

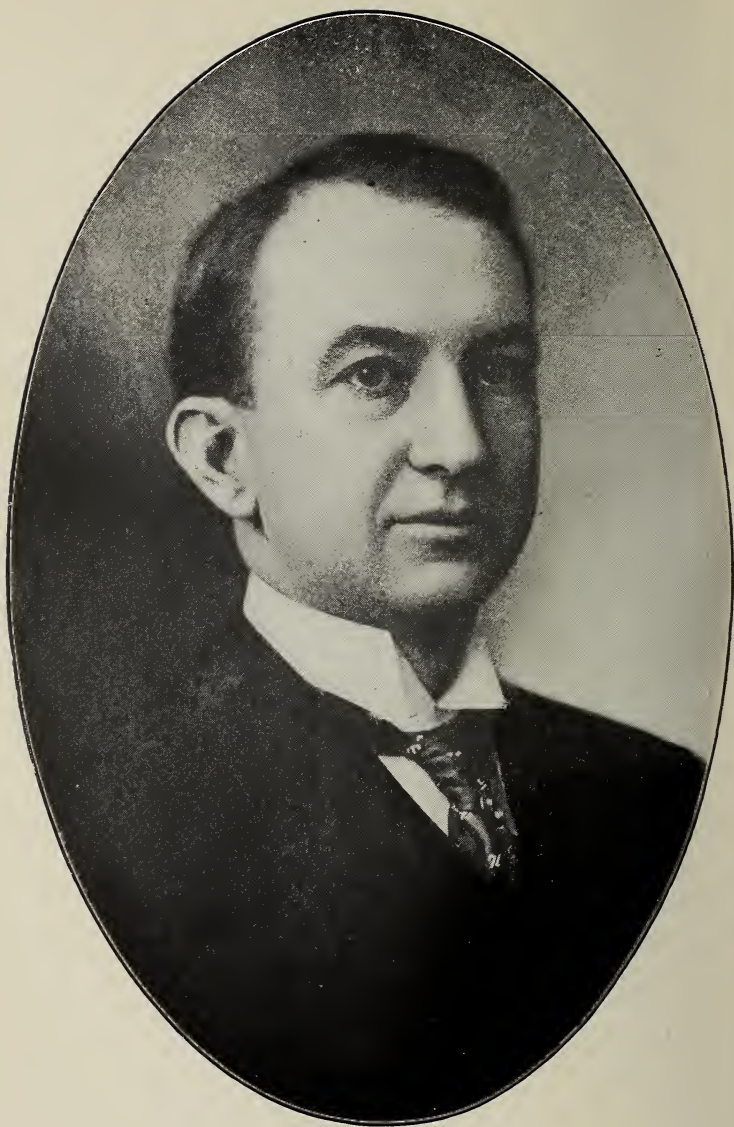


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ROBERT BRYCE MILLER, D.D.

“He Yet Speaketh”

A Selection of Sermons preached by
the Rev. Robert Bryce Miller, D.D.
Edited by the Rev. John S. Duncan, D.D.

Foreword by the
REV. JOHN McNAUGHER, D.D., LL. D.
President of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary



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In grateful remembrance of goodly fellowship and loyal support this volume is dedicated to the Churches which Dr. Miller served :

First United Presbyterian Church, Beaver, Pa.

First United Presbyterian Church, Butler, Pa.

Third United Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Foreword

THE sermons composing this volume are published as a memorial of the Rev. Robert Bryce Miller, D. D., who died in the pastorate of the Third United Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh on October 19, 1918. Formally the life of this true worker for the coming of the Kingdom of God can be told in a few words. He was born at New Hope, South Carolina, August 25, 1877. When he was about ten years of age the family moved to Sardis, North Carolina, near Charlotte. He was graduated from Erskine College, Due West, South Carolina, in 1899. Having resolved on the ministry, in which he was preceded by his honoured father, he enrolled in the Pittsburgh (then Allegheny) Theological Seminary of the United Presbyterian Church, and completed the course of study in 1902. Thereafter he was continuously in the service to which he had surrendered himself, constantly obeying with seriousness of purpose and strenuousness of will the commission received from his Lord. His first charge was at Beaver, Pennsylvania, where he was ordained and installed on October 28, 1902. From there he removed to the First Church of Butler, Pennsylvania, his new pastorate beginning June 24, 1908.

After spending almost six years at Butler, he answered the call of the Third Church of Pittsburgh, taking up his duties officially on March 12, 1914, and remaining in that relationship until his appointed "twelve hours" were over. In these three fields of labour—all of them important, but with the second surpassing the first in opportunity and responsibility, and the third the second—Dr. Miller gave himself unstintedly to his allotted task. There was a wealth of real, rich manhood in him, and this, sanctified and wrought upon by the Holy Spirit, became a working force in everything to which he set his hand. Never did he let his office crush his personality. Back of the message was the messenger, with his strong, balanced, sympathetic, genial selfhood. He had a heart charged with profound feeling for his fellowmen in their spiritual needs, and thus prompted he steadily braced himself to do a man's work. This made it that his ministry, while a draft on all that was vital, never partook of drudgery, but was a source of satisfaction and delight, and esteemed a privilege.

As a preacher Dr. Miller's ideals never dwindled, and so he went from strength to strength. He saw things from the angle of the common people, and spoke concretely. His thoughtfulness and studious habits saved him from falling into the ruts of commonplaceness, and his sermons had power in them to grapple and stir the soul. With a broad outlook and a wholesome spirit, he kept well out of that zone of pessimism which predicts social bankruptcy

and general chaos just ahead, preferring to interpret truth from the sanguine and sunny point of view of one who believed in a good time coming, and progressively coming. His congregations were sure to hear the Gospel, with its appealing notes of promise and comfort. He ranged through the cardinal themes of Christian faith and practice, all the while making Christ manifest and insistent.

The sermons that occupy the following pages, though few in number, are true to type. They have been selected by Rebekah Gordon Miller, the devoted wife of Dr. Miller, aided by the counsel of some friends, and have been edited by the Rev. John S. Duncan, D. D., of Mercer, Pennsylvania. With silent eloquence they will recall a man greatly beloved whom in the midst of his days God translated into eternal usefulness, a man the issues of whose serviceable life here will flow on full of survival values.

JOHN MCNAUGHER.

Pittsburgh, Pa.

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I

FROM CARE SET FREE

Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.—PHILIPPIANS 4:6.

IN giving this closing message on the general subject, Virtues that Count in Times of Peril, I would speak especially of the virtue of calmness or equanimity. This is the virtue by which we face life's emergencies with fortitude, that composure of spirit which cannot be disturbed. It seems to me that in these trying days there is special need of the exemplification of this virtue. People are so likely to give way to hysteria, to allow themselves to become victims of corroding care and of that type of amity which in destroying peace destroys usefulness. Aristotle, the "Father of Ethics," considered the virtue of equanimity the very crown of character. We perhaps would not give it so high a place, but certainly we would say that the possession of a calm and quiet spirit is one of the essential virtues of life.

At once the question arises, Is it possible to be possessed of such a spirit of equanimity? Is it possible to attain unto the exalted heights of these words of Paul, that in nothing are we to be anxious? Is it possible to live a life from care set free, a life of peace and calm in the midst of what-

ever storms may arise? There are a great many foolish answers to the question. There is the foolish answer of the Christian Scientist, who would set us free from care by denying the reality of things that disturb. There is the answer of the philosopher who says that whatever is is best, that it is possible to meet all the situations of life with a philosophic complacency. There is also the answer of the Stoic, who says that men must not permit themselves to become elated over success or to be downcast by failure, that the cultivation of a stoical indifference or suppression enables men to live their lives in such a way as to gain the victory over care. On the other hand, there is the answer of the Epicurean, who says, "Eat, drink, and be merry; for to-morrow we die," who would ignore the seriousness of life and drown to-morrow's anxiety in the wine of to-day.

It is evident that these views of life will not free life from care. The Stoic, for example, by his philosophy would contract the heart and dry up the very springs of life. The failure of the Christian Scientist is in that the denial of the reality of things does not make them any the less real. Sooner or later they will assert themselves. Similar objections can be brought against the other views.

It would seem to me, after careful study of this subject, that there is but one cure for care, but one way in which we can be set free from it, and that is by trusting in God and dedicating one's life to

the interests of the Kingdom of God. It seems to me that it is not possible for the life of the unbeliever to be free from anxiety, for his life is without the things which tend to free from care, without confidence in the paternal interest of God, in His fatherly love, in the eternal home which He has provided for His children.

On the contrary, the life that trusts God and learns to cast its anxious care upon Him, and to meet the issues and emergencies of life with prayer and confidence—in such a life there is no place for care. Such a life gives full and literal obedience to the counsel of the apostle: “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” It is a fact not to be denied that this virtue of calmness or equanimity of spirit reaches its finest development, indeed its only true expression, in the lives of Christian men and women. We find men like Job saying, in the midst of the most crushing providences, “I know that my Redeemer liveth.” We find the psalmist singing, “My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.” There was a majestic calmness about the life of David that can be accounted for only by his trust in God. “David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” The man who gave this counsel of our text exemplified it in his own life. With what calmness did Paul face the severest tests of life. When perils loomed before him he said, “None of these things move

me." He was in a Roman prison and writing out of his own experiences when he said to the Philip-pians, "Be careful for nothing." He displayed this same calmness as he faced death, saying, "I am now ready to be offered."

One marvels still at the majestic calmness of our Lord. A recent writer on the life of Jesus has a chapter dealing with the poise which He was always able to maintain. He never allowed Himself to be over-much disturbed, and He faced persecution with calmness. Beyond question the calmest spirit in the midst of the wild storms of persecution that raged about Him and beat upon His devoted head as He hung upon the cross of Calvary was that of Jesus. We wonder still how, at His trial, He stood in perfect calm as false witnesses bore their testimony against Him, as men smote Him in the face and spat upon Him, and placed the crown of thorns upon His brow. Through it all, like a lamb before her shearers, He was dumb and opened not His mouth. Such questions as He saw fit to answer He answered with perfect self-composure. Even on the cross He kept His calm and poise. The secret of such equanimity was His quiet trust and perfect confidence in the Father.

I have gone at such length that I might show that only the Christian can live a life from care set free. I wish to illustrate that truth as it bears upon the widest experiences of life. These I would state in this way: the interests of life, the investments of life, and the issues of life.

In a little study in connection with prayer-meeting the other evening I was impressed with this fact that when Jesus sent out His disciples on their missionary journeys He said to them, "Fear not," and the word translated "fear" is practically the same word that Paul used when he said, "Be not anxious." A little further study reveals the fact that what Jesus told these men was, in effect, that they had the right to be free from fear concerning the things I have just mentioned, the interests of life, the investments of life, and the issues of life. Let us consider these in their order.

I. First, freedom from care as to the interests of life.

By "interests" I mean what Jesus meant when in the Sermon on the Mount He used the words, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on." The answer to that temptation to anxiety about these common things of life, the things which we need for our bodies, is given in the words of Jesus: "A sparrow shall not fall on the ground without your Father. . . . Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." This does not mean, of course, that we are to make no effort to be useful and to do honest work and to make provision for the future; it does mean that we are not to give way to fear concerning these interests of life, for God teaches that He will take care of us if we trust Him and do our duty, and this no matter how difficult the

situations that face us or the emergencies that arise. In these words of our text Paul was writing to men and women who were in the midst of troublous times and were suffering persecution: "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

What is true as to the common and ordinary interests of life is true likewise as to the emergencies or crisis times. Too often we borrow trouble. We are full of forebodings over things that never will come to pass, and possibilities that may arise. It is so easy to imagine all sorts of calamities and forget the promises of God: "As thy days, so shall thy strength be;" "My grace is sufficient for thee."

We can lay this down as fundamental, that if we are God's children and do our duty, God will not only provide for our needs as they arise ordinarily, but will supply strength for the emergencies and fit us for whatever may arise in the future. It will not help us any to struggle; it will only weaken us to worry, and the cure for us all is confidence in God. It is this confidence in reference to all life's troubles that will produce a calm and quiet spirit:

"I would not have a restless will, that hurries to
and fro,
Seeking some great thing to do or secret thing
to know;
I would be treated as a child, and guided where
I go."

II. Freedom from care as to the investments of life.

How often people are tempted to worry as to whether their life is going to be a success, whether, also, the thing in which the life is invested is worth while. As the disciples of our Lord went forth to preach in His name He assured them that they need have no fear as to the future of that work in which they were about to invest their lives, that it was destined to succeed, that His kingdom would prosper and the cause for which they stood must prevail. From this we gain this fact, that the life invested in Christ and in the service of His kingdom need have no fear that the life will be a failure. Most of us can look back upon things in which we invested time, money, and thought. These enterprises failed and the things which we invested in them seem to have been lost; but that which we invest in the service of God is never lost, for with Him there is no failure. Again and again we have been assured that the Kingdom of God will come, that the temple of truth is being built slowly through the ages and that every life invested in Christ is a spiritual stone built into its walls, and when it has been completed we shall find to our eternal joy that in the rearing of the glorious structure we had a part, even though it were only a small part. Tennyson wrote that in this world nothing walks with aimless feet, and that not one life shall be destroyed or cast like refuse on the heap when God has made His pile complete. Whether true

universally, it is true of the life which has invested itself in the cause that is supremely worth while.

It will be seen eventually that life has not been wasted. I am thinking of the men who are going across the seas in the interests of the cause which we believe to be the cause of Christianity and righteousness. When we are disturbed by the fear that many of them may never return, let us not for one moment feel that such lives will have been a failure. Let not the men who go give way to anxiety. The cause of righteousness must win and if we are called upon to die in its behalf, the life and death will not have been in vain.

The same truth obtains in the lives of those who go out in response to the missionary appeal. The other day I was reading of a young physician who had been graduated with honours from Harvard and had gone as a medical missionary to China. This man had the brightest prospects in our own land, but he chose to bury himself in the midst of that seething multitude of people in North China. He was in China only six months when he fell a victim to an incurable disease and he sleeps to-day among the mountains of China. That life was not wasted. That which took him to China glorified his brief career.

The only cure, then, for anxiety over the investment of our lives is to identify them with some cause that is worth while, and especially the supreme cause of Jesus Christ. We shall be relieved of all anxiety as to failure, for if we do but the

least possible for the cause of Christ, we shall not have lived in vain. To the man of two talents, a man of only moderate endowment but faithful in the use of his gifts, Jesus said, "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things."

III. Freedom from care as to the issue of life.

To those disciples who went out into the uncertain future, to face bitter enmity, persecution, hardships, death itself, Jesus said, "Fear not them that can kill the body, and have nothing more that they can do." I suppose that our greatest temptation to give way to care comes when we think of the future, and especially that long future "beyond the door which swings ever inward but never out." What is the cure for care as to the future of ourselves and of our loved ones? It can be answered thus:

1. Death touches only the body; it does not touch the soul. No enemy can destroy a man's soul. No bayonet can reach it. No shell can dissipate it. The most that any man can do is kill the body. Death has power over the body alone. It can go no further.

2. Beyond this conflict, in which the body may be dissolved, there is for the child of God the Father's house, the home of many mansions.

3. That home brings God's children into the most perfect fellowship, "Then shall I know even as also I am known." This fellowship is not only with our Redeemer, but also with our loved ones,

who have gone before or who shall follow us into the realms of glory.

Among the soldiers of Great Britain death is spoken of as "Going West." Dr. Tiplady, an English chaplain, was asked as to the reason for thus speaking of death. His answer is highly significant. He said, "The sun sets in the west to rise in the east the following morning, and death is but a brief night that precedes the morning and the eternal sunlight of heaven." Only yesterday I read of a lad in France who wrote to his brother, "Take care of mother till I come home." A few days later his name was in the casualty list, and his mother, in her splendid faith, said, "He has not come home; he has gone home."

Let me sum it all up by saying this, that the heart that is fixed on God our Father, on Jesus Christ as the supreme expression of the Father's love, in whose service the whole life should be invested, and marked by a supreme confidence as to the Father's house as the home for the future, such an one can say with the Psalmist, "I shall never be moved," and with the great apostle, "In nothing am I anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving do I make known my requests unto God," and follow the counsel of Peter, that we cast all our care upon Him, knowing that He careth for us.

II

LOSING CHRIST

But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.—LUKE 2: 44.

WHEN we come to realize the meaning of this verse we see here one of the strangest incidents to be found in the Scriptures. How a father and mother could lose their boy and not know for a whole day that he had been lost, and lose him because they had gone on their way supposing him to have been in the company instead of actually knowing it, not discovering the loss until night, is hard indeed to understand. The strangest part of it is that he could be lost by the mother, by her who bore him and loved him and ministered to him and knew withal that he was no ordinary child. Yet she was so eager to get home, so absorbed in the company of those with whom she journeyed, so taken up with all that she had seen in Jerusalem, that she lost her boy. He was lost in the most unlikely place, for they lost him as they were turning from church. Some of our children might be lost returning from church because their parents are not with them, but the father and mother of Jesus were in the company with him and still he was

lost. They lost him because they took it for granted that he was with them, playing somewhere in the circle of children, instead of knowing certainly that he was there. Those three days between the discovery that their boy was lost and their finding him in the temple must have been extremely distressing.

In this incident there stands out one great fact which might well be considered by Christian men and women, the possibility of losing Christ. I am thinking not so much of the permanent loss of Christ as that temporary loss which means that we must go along in the journey of life sorrowfully because we are without Him.

A Christian life may be defined as one of union and communion with Christ. That, perhaps, is the simplest definition. It is a life lived in constant fellowship with Him, conversing with Him in prayer, feeling His help in the time of need, going to Him with all our secrets and living consciously as in His presence. But let us remember that He does not come where He is not welcomed. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Nor does He stay if He is not wanted. Therefore, let us ask ourselves this question, Is Christ really with us or do we only suppose Him to be in the company? For no one knows better than ourselves whether we have Christ with us or whether we only suppose Him to be with us. No one knows so quickly as we ourselves when we lose Him. A great musician made it a rule to practice eight hours a day.

When surprise was expressed at this, his answer was, "If I should not practice for a single day, I would know it; if for two days, my friends would know it; and if for three days, the world would know it." The truth thus expressed applies in our relations to Christ. If we lose Him for even a short time, we are conscious that something has gone out of our lives. If we lose Him for a few weeks, our friends detect the loss. If for months we cease our Christian fellowship in prayer and public worship, the world sees the change that comes over our lives and knows that we are backsliders. Great Christians are made like great musicians, by constant "practice of the presence of Christ," who brings music into our lives by touching them with His love and grace. The theme, therefore, which I wish to have you study with me to-day is this,—Losing Christ.

Two things are to be considered: first, the possibility of our losing Him; and, second, the principle of restoration to His presence.

I. The possibility of our losing Christ.

If as they went to Jerusalem some one had said to his mother that on the journey she would lose her son, she would have laughed in scorn. Yet the fact is that she did lose him and ~~went~~ a whole day before she discovered her loss. If we Christians should be told that it is possible for us to lose Christ, to be without His companionship, we would not believe it. Yet it is possible and I wish to look with you at this possibility.

1. Some because of past experience suppose Christ to be in their company. Mary knew that the boy Jesus was with them when they were ready to start, and she supposed that he was with them still. It was only when night came upon them and darkness fell that she realized to her sorrow that he was not there. Some time in our lives we have come face to face with Christ. We have felt His power and been thrilled by the resolution to live a Christian life. We have confessed Him, have become members of His Church, and had the profound conviction that He was ours and we were His. Then we have trusted to that experience and thought that because Christ was with us once He is with us still, only, like Mary, to find in some hour of need that He was not there.

I am not disparaging the experience or questioning its reality. The point I am striving to make is that one experience is not enough. It must be renewed day by day. In Christian experience there is nothing this side of eternity that has in it the element of finality. Penitence must not be once for all; there must be a daily sorrow for and confession of sin. Even the yielding to Christ must be repeated day by day. If we do not keep up these Christian exercises and experiences, we are just supposing Christ to be with us, when in reality He has passed out of our lives.

2. We suppose Him to be in our company because of our belief in Him and in the truths of His Word. His mother believed in Him. She be-

lieved what God revealed to her concerning Him, and yet she lost Him. One may be perfectly orthodox in his beliefs concerning Christ and yet not have Christ. We may have light and not have life. It is possible to have the head believe and not the heart. We may be like Simon Magus, who believed in Christ intellectually, and yet Peter said of him that he was in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. It is possible to know the Bible from beginning to end, to hold sound views as to its teachings, and yet not know the fellowship that is in Christ. I was once acquainted with an old gentleman who was wont to lament the liberality of the Church, who bewailed what he believed to be a tendency on the part of the Presbyterian churches to drift away from Calvinism, a man who actually believed in infant damnation, and yet he was a hardened sinner indulging in drink and other sins. It is, therefore, possible for us to suppose that because we have sound views as to Christ we have Him with us when in reality we are strangers to Him.

3. Some suppose Christ to be in their company because they are busy at Christian work; but we must remember that the parents of Jesus were busy at Christian work. They were on their way home from church. They were talking to their neighbours about the great things of the feast, and still they lost Christ. There is a lesson here for all who are active in Christian service, for workers and officers in the Church. Business is not holi-

ness. The hands may be full and the heart may be empty. The lips may be warm with false fire, while the heart is as cold as a stone. Our work for Christ, strange as it may seem, may cause us to lose Christ. That is, we may so busy ourselves in the work from other motives that we lose the very heart of it all, Christ Himself. It is possible for us to keep the vineyard of others, while our own vineyard we have not kept. Christ wants our work, but most of all He wants our hearts and our daily fellowship with Him. Gypsy Smith tells that when he went back home after nine months in this country he found his pastor overwhelmed with work in arranging a home for the waifs of the city. Though Gypsy Smith had been long separated from his family, he felt it to be his duty to help out. As he was working his little daughter Sylva was hanging to his coat-tails and playing about him in childish glee. Being in the company of a gentleman, whom he feared the child would disturb, he gave her some money and told her to buy some candy. The little girl quickly replied that she did not want his money, that he had been away from her so long she just wanted to be with him. The father said that it was a great rebuke to him. There are people who are willing to give Christ their services, their money, their time. All of these are good, but Christ wants us and not ours. I am not exaggerating, therefore, when I say that this may be one way in which people in the Church may lose Christ. No amount

of Christian service is a substitute for fellowship with Christ. Companionship with Him comes first and service should be at once a help to that companionship and the expression of our devotion to Him who has counted us worthy of a place in His service.

4. Some suppose Him to be in their company because they are too busy with other things, often the things of the world, to find out certainly that He is there. The deepest truth about this loss on the part of Mary was that she was so busy getting her things together and enjoying the fellowship of her friends and planning for the trip home, that she just took for granted that her boy was with her and did not take time to see if he really was in the company. Her work was all good. There is no criticism to be made because of her interest in her plans and in her friends, but all of these things were secondary to that of having her boy with her, and they could have been entered into more joyfully if she had been sure that he was there.

In this there is a lesson for our own day. We are busy in these days with many things. In the home, in business, in behalf of our country, men and women are crowded with work. It is the tragedy of our souls if we allow ourselves to be so absorbed in anything, even of great importance, that we lose the Lord out of our lives, if we neglect His worship and prayer. Some sad day we shall waken to realize that our Christ has gone.

II. The restoration of the lost Christ.

It was a sad hour when Mary discovered that her boy was not of the company. Those three days in which she was seeking him must have been terrible. The thought of her lost boy in a great city, and especially a country boy who did not know the city, would be enough almost to turn her heart to stone. We know how any of us would feel in such circumstances. One of the writers from the battle-front says that the most terrible news is that summed up in the one word "missing." There may be some comfort when one knows that a loved one is at rest in the sleep of death, and comfort, too, when one knows that a loved one is only wounded and is being taken care of by tender hands in a hospital; but "missing" may mean one or more of many terrible things. It was an awful moment for Mary when she realized that her boy was missing and we can better imagine than describe that search lasting all through that first night, the next day, and the following night until the morning of the third day, when she found him.

Let us look for a little at the steps in the restoration of the lost boy as suggesting or illustrating the way by which, if we have lost Christ out of our lives, we can find Him again and keep Him.

1. There had to be a confession of loss on the part of the mother. That would be no easy thing either. It was rather humiliating to have to confess to the throng of people that she had actually gone on and left her boy behind. It is always

humiliating to have to confess one's shortcomings, and when we have drifted away from the loving and faithful Saviour if we would get back to Him a similar humiliation must be ours. It may be that some of us, as we look back over the years, are realizing now that we have indeed lost Christ, that prayer has lost its power, the Word of God its sweetness, and fellowship with the people of God its delight. There is but one remedy. Like honest men and women we must come and face our Lord and Christ, face Him before our friends and before the Church, and resolve that by God's grace we shall find Him. Our encouragement is in His word of promise given: "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

2. There is the suggestion, too, that every other interest must be laid aside until this search is rewarded. Mary changed all her plans. She parted with her friends as they went on their way. She left everything and went back and searched until she found him.

This we, too, must do if Christ has departed from our lives. We must plumb the depths of our hearts, put away every sin, and make this supreme search, seeking first His kingdom and Himself and resolve that we will never give up until we have found Him. There is often a great deal in our religion that is superficial. We attack other problems seriously and go through with them. We are content to *suppose* that God is with us, and the

fearful thing about it is that in some hour when need presses hard, we find that He is not with us. I knew a woman in this community who imagined that she was a Christian. She had become very much interested in Christian Science and felt that it would satisfy her life. The result was that she gave up the church of her fathers and her friends. The hour came when sickness took hold upon her and death stared her in the face. Then she discovered that she did not have Christ. In the time when she needed Him most He was not with her because years before she had lost Him and was fondly deluding herself that He was yet in her company. With the diligence which marked this mother's search for her boy should we search our hearts until we come to the place where we find Christ. It may be necessary to go very deep and to cut away things that have stood between us and Him, but at any cost we ought to find Him.

3. This story suggests that the best place to find Christ is in His Church. The lonely boy, when he discovered that he had been left behind in the great city, did what was the most natural thing in the world for him to do. As soon as he discovered that he had been left behind, he went to the temple, and there, after three days, his mother found him. She found him in the temple of God, and it has always seemed strange to me that she did not seek him there first.

There is a suggestion here which it might be well for us to note. We hear much of religious

exercises and fellowship outside the Church. I have heard men say that they could find God as they walked by the river, on a Sabbath ride with friends, or sitting at home reading a good book. But Mary did not find Christ until she found Him in the Father's house. In the very nature of things it is in the Father's house that we still are to look for the Son. Jesus loved to linger about the temple then; He lingers within its sacred walls still. If in fidelity to its service and worship we come back to the Church, we shall find what Mary found, Jesus waiting to receive us.

4. There is a final suggestion: Mary found Jesus where she lost Him.

This is generally where men and women find Him. We have got to get back to the place where we parted company with Him, to the place where, in broken vow or deliberate sin, we turned our back upon Him and left Him. We must go back and make confession, back to the doing of some work which we have left undone, to the paying of some vow we have left unpaid, back to the place where we lost Him. There we will find Christ waiting, patiently and lovingly, to go again on life's journey with us. When Jacob lost God out of his life, he had to go back to Bethel. There he found God ready to renew His covenant with him. That Lot might find his God again he must flee from Sodom and go to the oaks of Mamre, where he had parted company with Him. Peter had to go to the lake where he had made his rash vow,

“ Though all should forsake thee, yet will not I.” There where he had first found Jesus he found Him again, heard His words, “ Lovest thou me?” and was restored again to the confidence of the Master and to service in His kingdom.

To-day, as we look over our past and perchance realize that Christ has gone out of our lives, a little thought will tell us just where we lost Him. It was in some sin that we committed, some wrong which we did another, some broken vow, some overwhelming enterprise which crowded Him out of our lives. If we would find Him and have restored unto us the joy of His salvation, we must retrace our steps and make confession of our sins. When Jesus said to Zacchæus, “ To-day I must abide at thy house,” he knew the conditions and said, “ Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” He got right with Christ by getting right with his own past, and then Christ went home with him. To-day He waits patiently in His temple, as He waited patiently those three long days for His mother to come again and take Him home with her. If we have lost Him out of our lives, let us, through repentance and confession, go back to Him and find Him and take Him with us through the years. When we start on our journey in His company, even though the road may lead to Nazareth and it may be a rough road, and Nazareth may be poor and mean and full of toil and trial, the road

will really be brighter. And we may be sure that whatever experiences may come, they will be made glorious by His promise and His presence. "Lo, I am with you alway." Let us, then, go up to the Jerusalem of our broken vows and take Christ with us to Nazareth.

III

ACCEPTING THE CROSS

(MATT. 26: 39-46.)

THE three sources of the temptation of Jesus were Satan, His fellowmen, and His own flesh. The temptation which we are to study to-day had its source in His own flesh, the natural shrinking of the human spirit from the agony and the shame of the cross.

Jesus never looked out toward the cross without a reluctance and hush falling upon His spirit. He always referred to it as His "hour," and spoke of that hour in most solemn tones. At the wedding in Cana of Galilee He even rebuked His mother, saying, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." On the mountain of transfiguration He spoke with the heavenly visitants of the death He should accomplish at Jerusalem. When the Greeks came seeking Him, He said that the grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die. When the sons of Zebedee strove for the foremost place in His kingdom, He referred to His cup and His baptism. Here, on the night before His passion, He sees His cross etched upon the evening sky, and He shrinks from it. In fact this was the only time in His life that He

asked to escape His Father's will. "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

It was probably midnight of Thursday when He entered Gethsemane. He had experienced a busy and a trying week, teaching all the day long, talking with His disciples and with His friends till late in the night, in all probability getting no sleep at all. Judas had gone out and betrayed Him, and He knew that the crisis was near. Besides being weary from labour and loss of sleep, the thought of the cross stood out in all its black horror, and the temptation that entered His soul was to refuse the cup and run away from it altogether, choosing some easier way to perform His mission to the world; but He found help in prayer and gained the victory, and now faces the betrayal and all the sufferings of the cross not only with perfect calm, but actually made His cross a place of counsel, of blessing, and of prayer.

Let us look then at the power of that temptation, the prayer for power, and the power received.

I. The power of that temptation.

Why did Jesus so shrink from the cross? What was there even in this terrible experience that, more than anything else in His life, caused Jesus to shrink from doing His Father's will? We cannot answer these questions, nor shall we ever be able to answer them in their fulness this side of the veil; but there are three things about the experience that made the cross peculiarly hard to bear:

There was, first of all, the matter of physical pain. For Jesus there was peculiar horror in the cross because, for one thing, He was of a tender and sensitive nature. He was a young man, not dying from exhausting sickness, but in the bloom of His youth. It is one thing for a man of iron nerve and brute-like frame to yield himself to the surgeon's knife; it is another thing for a man with a keen and sensitive nature, with a vivid imagination, to yield himself to torture. The higher in the scale of being, the finer in organization, the greater is the agony both in experience and in anticipation. We would expect him to face and go through that ordeal calmly. Many of the martyrs before him sang psalms while the fire burned their flesh, and white-robed companies sang praises while the lions were bearing down upon them. Even tender women have called to each other in words of cheer while the rising tide chilled them into death. But these heroic souls had with them in flame and tide the living and all-sustaining Christ. Jesus trod the winepress alone and for Him there was no helper. In His flesh, worn by labour and strain and grief and loss of sleep, He shrank from the physical agony of the cross.

The second element in it was the pain of mental distress. After all, was this the hour to which God was leading Him, this the way? Could this be the will of God? He had all His life anticipated the cross. He had read the prophecies concerning the manner of His death, but when He came to that

hour all was uncertain, and with the pain of body doubt swept in over His soul. On the evening of September 22, 1862, Abraham Lincoln sat with the proclamation of emancipation before him unsigned. Liberty to the slaves had been one of the dreams and purposes of his life. He had looked forward to the hour when he could strike the fetters from four millions of people. With fervent lips he had prophesied its coming, through the years had cherished this high ambition, yet when he faced the actual deed he hesitated. He took up his pen again and again only to lay it down. He knew that hearts both north and south would swell in thanksgiving at his deed; he knew that sooner or later it was inevitable. Yet with quivering lips he asked, Is this the hour? Was there no gentler way, no way that would cause less suffering in the prodigal South and even shrinking back in some hearts of the North? With less violence might not these prodigal states be won? Is this the hour and the will of God? In that mental anguish, his biographer tells us, he remained through all the night, and only as the morning light was breaking did he sign his name.

When we think that Jesus found it ever easy to know the Father's will, we greatly err. With Him, as with us, the problem was to know the Father's will as well as to do it. Once He knew it clearly and felt God's presence with Him, He went bravely to the cross. "Arise, let us go hence." But all the time there was the mental anguish of

indecision and doubt. How many of you in some small measure have ever experienced that anguish? I felt it in some measure in the first call that came to me to preach, and in some measure I have felt it as from time to time I have been called upon to consider change of place. And you too have had your Gethsemane as you have struggled to know the will of God and striven for courage to do or bear that will.

The third element was the pain of loneliness and desolation. One of the things that impresses itself upon the heart as we read again this story is the utter loneliness of it all. In the garden He left His disciples and went a little farther alone. At the betrayal all forsook Him and fled. At the trial Peter went out and He was left alone with His enemies. On the cross even the Father hid His face until in His agony He cried, "Why hast thou forsaken me?"

But even this was not His most trying loneliness. That came in the loneliness of His humiliation and His shame. There are three kinds of loneliness. There is that of solitude, which is often desirable as one seeks the quiet of a secluded stream for meditation. Then there is the loneliness of character such as all great men have, Moses and Paul and Jesus. Then there is the loneliness of shame and humiliation. There are times when such shame and humiliation come and one is left alone in it. That was the loneliness of Job. Great grief and loss had come to

him. His friends forsook him and passed by with haughty mien. Even his comforters accused him of some great sin. In his loathsome sickness and suffering his friends were ashamed of him. In Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* we read the story of the loneliness of Jean Valjean. When men discover his shame, lover, acquaintance, and friend fall away from him. Little children look upon him with distrustful eye. Homes once open to him are barred against him. The agony of the man was in a large measure due to the loneliness which sin brought upon him. Let any man recall the hour in which some great shame and humiliation fell upon him or upon a dear one. Do you remember the silence of that loneliness? How few sought your door. How few there were to speak a word of cheer. That was the loneliness of the cross. In the humiliation and shame of Jesus His friends forsook Him and fled. The crowd felt that He was indeed a malefactor as were those who hung on either side. I knew a man who was a minister. He had a wayward son who every night was drunk and to be found in places of ill repute in the city. That minister, a man of fine and sensitive nature, would seek out his son in the places of sin and lead him home. Those who frequented the places of shame looked upon him too as a frequenter of the same places, only that he was still sober. Even members of his congregation passed him by in silence. That was the shame of the cross. He who hung thereon was misjudged

by stranger and enemy, and misunderstood even by His friends. The shame of the cross is the finest proof of the love of Him who was the victim of the cross. A father or mother will suffer humiliation, bear the misjudgment of the world, be patient under the silence of friends and lead home a drunken son or a wayward daughter. Jesus will permit Himself to be looked upon as a malefactor, die on the cross made only for criminals, be forsaken by His friends, all that He might lead you and me back from darkness and death to light and life.

This, then, was the temptation of the cross. It is not a matter of wonder that He shrank from it.

II. The prayer for power.

I have referred to the fact that in every crisis in the life of our Lord He found refuge in prayer. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at that when He stood facing the cross with all its horror, and that for the reasons spoken of He shrank from it, He should at such a time seek refuge in prayer. That He might engage in prayer He went into the seclusion of that garden whither many times before He had resorted for the same purpose. That this garden was owned by some friend, or possibly a secret disciple of Jesus, as was the case with the colt and the upper room, is altogether probable. Such an owner would gladly permit the use of it. It was about the hour of midnight that, saying to His disciples, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful," He went to the familiar place. Leaving His dis-

ciples behind Him, He went a little farther and knelt in prayer. This He did three times. In connection with this prayer there are two things I would have you note:

First, it was a prayer that He might clearly know God's will, know that this was the hour in which and the method by which He should redeem the world. That dread of the cross was part of His anguish I have tried to show, and that uncertainty that this was the hour and the way added to His suffering. It is only in harmony with the self-limitation that Jesus attributed to Himself that He felt this uncertainty. Then, too, doubt is often the result of a mind tired and a body wearied with its toils. And while we may have in a general way a knowledge of God's will for us, how often we feel a great desire for some clear proof that we are really in the way of God's will for us. Some sign that we are right and that our feet are following the way marked out for us is our earnest prayer. While the Master knew in a general way the death that He must die, and had even talked of it with Moses and Elijah, He wished to know clearly and definitely that this was the hour and the method. How refreshing and inspiring it is to have a firm and clear conviction that you are in the way that God would have you go! and through prayer such conviction is possible.

The second thing to be observed is that this is not only the highest object of prayer, but as well its highest form, that form in which there is the

least of asking and the most of waiting upon God. Prayer is one thing, petition is another. A great deal of the communion of Jesus with the Father was in the form of waiting upon God rather than the form of begging God. His last prayer was not a petition at all, but unreserved submission to God and a consecration of Himself to the will of God. "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

In other words, Jesus prayed till prayer made Him cease to pray as praying is commonly understood. For prayer, thus understood, He substitutes consecration and surrender. It cost time and struggle, but this is the lesson, that we pray until prayer makes us cease to pray. It is for us to pray until we forget our own wish and merge our wills into the will of God. And the highest form of victory in prayer is not when through prayer we have escaped the trial, but when like the Master we have learned to say, "Arise, let us go to meet the evil courageously and victoriously."

III. The power received.

We see matchless power and courage displayed by the Master when He walked calmly from that garden, saying to His disciples, "Arise, let us be going." Then from the moment He met His betrayer until He cried, "It is finished," He bore Himself through those awful hours of agony and darkness with calmness, dignity, and self-control so majestic as to cause even His enemies to marvel. The hardened captain of the army of Rome, accustomed to seeing men die, cried out, "Certainly

this was a righteous man." One poor criminal at His side saw in Him his Saviour, and his cry was, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." As has been said, He died not like a man but like a God, and this because He had surrendered to the will of God and accepted the cross.

Victory over temptation for us lies in the prayer of submission to God's will till self-will becomes self-surrender. In such a prayer we must say, "Not my will, but thine be done." Doing this, we shall find our compensation, and that is the knowledge that whatever comes is the best, best for us and best for all. Whatever comes, take it to the Lord in prayer, and pray till prayer makes you cease to pray and leaves you saying as did our Lord, "Thy will be done." Take it to the Lord in prayer.

IV

GOD'S ARISTOCRATS

I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich).—REVELATION 2:9.

THE church at Smyrna, to which this message is addressed, was one of the most interesting of all the early churches. Situated in one of the highly influential cities of the first-century world, it had a most checkered history. The city of Smyrna was the only rival of Ephesus in Asia, though not as large. It was peculiarly a city of education, of wealth, and of refinement. It was one of the seven cities which claimed to be the birthplace of Homer. It was a Greek city and was rebuilt by Alexander the Great. To this day it is one of the largest cities of Asia Minor and the center of missionary operations on the part of the Presbyterian and Reformed Presbyterian churches.

As to the founding of the church in this city we have no record. We know only that its minister was Polycarp, who died a martyr when he was ninety years old, and it is probable that this letter was addressed to him. The church in Smyrna had suffered almost constant persecution, not only at the hands of the pagan population and the Roman officials but as well from the Jews.

It is a matter of significance that this city, now in the center of Armenia, is still in the midst of the bitter persecutions of the Turks. It is rather remarkable that to this church, which was peculiarly a suffering church, there is addressed no word of complaint. It is the only one of the seven churches of which this is true. The meaning of that is, that in this church and in the lives of its people there was nothing with which Christ was displeased, and that is praise which can rarely be bestowed upon either an individual or a church.

Though there is no complaint, there is not a great deal in the way of commendation. The church in Smyrna is not as highly commended as is that in Ephesus. Indeed, two or three of these seven churches seem to have been of greater excellence. But in the commendation of this church there is one word that is singularly freighted with meaning. To this church Christ's word is, "Thou art rich." This statement, though only in a parenthesis, is the key to the meaning of the whole message. Jesus said to this people, "You are God's aristocrats."

Under a single statement concerning Christ's conception of riches we may be able to gather up the message of the Master to this church.

When He said to this church, "Thou art rich," He certainly did not have in mind material wealth, for in the same sentence He says, "I know thy poverty." The truth of this is confirmed by the record of history, which tells us that the property

of the church was largely confiscated. Neither did Christ mean the riches of learning. Nor could He have meant the riches of family inheritance. There are four kinds of aristocracy in the world. There is the aristocracy of wealth, which is not worth while. There is that of family. There is the aristocracy of learning, and that of character. When Jesus said to this church, "Thou art rich," His words must have referred to character, for the only aristocracy He ever recognized or commended was that of character. When He found men covetous for the possession of worldly wealth, He spoke in rebuke and warning the parable of the rich fool, saying, "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." When the Jews were congratulating themselves on their aristocracy of family, saying, "We have Abraham to our father," He told them that despite their descent from Abraham they were the children of the devil. When the Pharisees manifested pride of learning, He said to them, "Except ye humble yourselves, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." What a contrast to Himself of Whom it is written, "He who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich." And the riches referred to in these great words are beyond question spiritual riches. So also is the reference in these words addressed to the church of Smyrna. In an analysis of the words let us find our message for the day.

I. Spiritual riches are to be found in the possession of a living and changeless Christ.

"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore." He revealed to them that regardless of the providences that came into their lives, and the sufferings which these brought, these mattered little so long as they were in possession of the living and changeless Christ. By "riches," then, we are to understand the possession of Christ, who is alive and holds the keys of death, and whose love does not change even though changing conditions mark our lives. What is to be observed is that Christ emphasizes the changelessness of His love to people living under a cloud. It is the truth which finds expression in the familiar line of the good Longfellow, "Behind the clouds is the sun still shining." It is a truth which we need to learn to-day. In these dull autumn days the sun may be hidden from our sight, but we know that it still shines. The dreadful war may seem to cover over the love of God, but that love shines on, and one day, when clouds have scattered, will break forth in all its splendour. This was the comfort in the message to the Hebrew Christians, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever," a living Christ and a changeless Christ. It is to be remembered that our Lord looks upon nothing as settled in this present world. In His eyes death is but a detail, an incident. Only on the other side of the grave is there final settlement, and time is small compared with

eternity, and eternity becomes real because He lives.

A few days since I listened to an address given by a gentleman who but recently was on the battle front. One thing which he emphasized was the contempt with which the average soldier looks upon death. It means to him nothing more than any other detail of the duties of a soldier. According to the speaker the explanation is not in the fact of familiarity with death, but springs from a deep sentiment of religion, a feeling that death is only the releasing of limited energies, the opening of doors to larger opportunities. So Christ assures us, as He assured that ancient people, that if we possess Him, living and unchanging, regardless of our standing as determined by the world, we are rich.

II. Spiritual wealth consists in being the objects of Christ's great purpose of love for our lives.

For the people of the church in Smyrna the Lord had a great purpose of love, a purpose involving the noblest character and the largest service. The means by which this purpose was to be accomplished seemed severe, but the possession of the character and the rendering of the service required was worth any price that might be demanded. As a general statement it may be said that Christ has a great purpose of love for our lives. That that purpose has to do with character and service I have been trying to show. The method leading to the accomplishment of this purpose may call for suffer-

ing, the price may be great, but in the realization we grow rich. In the Scriptures of the Old Testament there are words which beautifully illustrate this truth: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him." The object of the parent bird is to teach the young birds to fly, to make them strong and self-reliant. To accomplish this she breaks up the nest in which they have tarried for a time as fledglings. She flings them out into the air from a lofty height and they are compelled to fly or at least to make the attempt. Should the struggle, however, become too hard for the young birds the mother bird swoops under them and bears them again to safety. This she continues to do until the young have learned to defy the air and live in the azure depths. So the great object of God's love in our lives is character and achievement. Sometimes the means used are severe and leave us struggling.

There are also words of the Saviour which give emphasis to the price to be paid for attaining unto God's purpose of love. When the disciples asked who should be greatest in the Kingdom of God, Jesus put to them the question, "Are you willing and able to pay the price?" He taught them that the price which they must pay was the price which He Himself had to pay, the cup of suffering and the baptism of self-sacrifice.

So Jesus said to the troubled men and women of

Smyrna, "The tribulation and reviling which you suffer at the hands of men, and the buffeting of your souls by Satan, mean spiritual enrichment."

It is plain, therefore, that the great purpose of Christ, not only as to the individual and the Church, the world indeed, is a purpose of love, that God's people be God-like and God-useful. The same truth obtains as to His Church. He is calling upon her to-day to endure hardness as a good soldier, to sacrifice some of the little differences that have tended to rend the garments of Christ. We believe that the same thing is true of the world itself. God makes the wrath of man to praise Him. No matter how much the world must suffer, it will be very much richer if through the bitterness of war it learns to do God's will. No matter what changes may come in the Church, it will be a richer Church, if it learns through the baptism of suffering to be truer to Christ. The same is true as to our lives. We become God's aristocrats only when His purpose of love is realized in character and life.

It will help us all to gain the true perspective of life, help us to be calm in the midst of life's storms, if we will but realize the increasing purpose of God that runs through life, its character and serviceableness. We are to be, in the words of Tennyson, "Not as idle ore, but as iron dug from central gloom, washed in vats of hissing tears and battered with the shock of Doom to shape and use."

It may be, as in the case of Smyrna, that nothing short of persecution and hardships and storms will

serve to bring out the best that is in us and to release the hidden music of our lives. The story is told of a German nobleman, that, delighted with a small Æolian harp that sang in his casement window, he conceived the idea of constructing a harp on a grand scale. Across a deep ravine in a neighbouring mountain he strung a network of cables and wires of varying sizes. Then he waited for the music, but only disappointment was his portion. Days and nights passed, the weeks came and went, and the great harp remained silent. At length one dark night a fearful storm swept over the mountain. Then out of the heart of the storm there came strange, sweet, weird music that seemed to be that of the gods of mountain and tempest. In this we may find a parable of life. How many lives there are in which there seems to be no music, nothing of beauty or sweetness or grace. Then breaks some awful storm and in the darkness the music pours forth. We are, therefore, rich in the realization of God's purpose of beauty and usefulness in our lives, the possession of a character rich toward man and God, rich for the life which now is and richer still for the life which is to come. The traveller going from one country to another must repeatedly change his coins. The currency of Mexico, for example, is of little value in the United States. Godly character, however, is a coin that is negotiable both in earth and heaven.

III. This church of Smyrna was rich in the prospects which God set before it.

As a glorious prospect He held before the people the crown of life and immunity from the second death. "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." It will be worth our while to give some thought to what is involved in these promises. Everywhere the Scriptures speak of that strange thing which is called "the second death." The first death all men experience. It is, however, an experience which the Christian need not fear. But those who are not the children of God, those who wilfully reject His love, are the victims of a second death, the death of the soul. The mysteries involved we do not need to consider. Hard to explain, it is the one thing we are taught to fear with a deadly fear. The Master said, "Fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Immunity from this second death is an element in the riches of the believer. The second death cannot touch him. The crown of life is the positive promise and prospect of him who is rich toward God. When the Greek runner reached the goal there was placed upon his brow the wreath of olive, the mark and the reward of victory. Life itself is a race, a long and trying race beset with difficulties, but he who by his faith in God reaches the goal is crowned with the victor's wreath. Of some things we are wont to say, "The game is not worth the candle." But the Christian life is a game to which the saying cannot be applied. In the Christian race every

winner has pressed upon his brow, by the hand of God Himself, the crown of eternal life.

The one word of counsel which Jesus offers to His Church is this word "faithfulness." "Be thou faithful unto death." This is the one quality of soul without which there can be no victor's crown. It is not an attainment easy to make, especially when providences are dark; but "he that endureth to the end shall be saved." Job, the suffering saint of God, was overwhelmed with loss and grief, but he resolved that faith should not fail: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." This faith brought him through the darkness into the light of day. To Peter the Master said, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Peter's faith in the unfailing love of Christ brought him through the dark night of guilt into the morning light of a glad new day, that day in which Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." The one course in the midst of the dark and trying experiences of life that will make victory certain is that of unqualified faithfulness. That is an anchor which will hold in any storm. In that psalm which an eloquent preacher likened unto the nightingale, singing out its cheer and sweetness through the darkness of the night, the assurance of the writer is, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

V

THE HEM OF HIS GARMENT: A SACRAMENTAL MEDITATION

And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment: for she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.

—MATTHEW 9: 20, 21.

EVERY recorded miracle of our Lord has in it some distinct teaching. Of His miracles we have only a partial record. The writers did not seek to pile miracle upon miracle in order to demonstrate Christ's power, as an attorney for the defense would pile up testimony as to the good character of his client in order to break the force of the accusation brought against him. Rather the Gospel writers give us the stories of only a few of Christ's miracles and show us the truth which each teaches. The point to be emphasized in the story here is that this woman felt that she must touch the hem of Christ's garment if she would be made whole. In other words, the teaching is, that if men and women would be healed and blessed by Christ, they must come into contact with Him, and whatever may help us to such contact is indeed a blessing.

The fact of her long and incurable infirmity is suggestive of the helpless and incurable condition

of humanity without Christ. But that I shall not deal with at this time.

What I would emphasize for a little is that before we can get the power of Christ into our lives, we must come into connection with Him by faith, and whatever may help to this end becomes a blessing to the soul.

I. First, then, to be saved by Christ we must touch Him.

It is by this touch that healing energy passes from Christ to us. It is a well-known principle or fact in the realm of the mechanical, that if we wish to transmit force from one body to another, we must first establish some sort of union between them. In a cotton mill, for example, you may have the most improved machinery and in the basement you may have a great engine and dynamo of enormous power; but unless you connect the instrument of power with the instruments of production, every spindle and loom will be motionless. There hangs before our eyes a beautiful chandelier. Down somewhere in the city one can hear the whir of a great dynamo; but you must connect the two before that cluster of lamps will glow and flood this room with light. Now, while we cannot always reason from the natural to the spiritual, still we have in this law of material force an analogy which enables us to see clearly the truth that if the life of one spirit is to pass into another, there must be some sort of contact established.

If a young man is to be ruined by his tempters,

they must first establish a union between themselves and their intended victim, and so gain his confidence and good-will. On the contrary, if a bad man is to be reclaimed by a good man, the good must establish a bond of union with him whom he would help. Now it is only an application of this same truth to the relations between men and God when it is said that if a poor sinner and helpless is to be reclaimed by Christ, he must in some way be brought into spiritual union with the Lord Jesus.

Now what is the link which connects the sinful soul with Christ? It is the faith or trust of the sinner in Christ. Whatever helps a soul to get into union with Christ is to be desired and sought after. In the incident here recorded the woman touched the hem of Christ's garment. By her faith her soul touched Him so that she received the life that was in Him. His virtue passed into her soul to redeem and heal, and she went her way in peace.

And this at once prompts the question, Where is the hem of Christ's robe to-day? The hem which this poor woman touched was probably one of the four tassels hanging from His seamless coat; but that garment, which possibly His mother's hands had fashioned, has long since mouldered into dust. Never again can any sick one creep up near to Him and touch that fringe of blue. Is there, then, no hem for us to touch? Can this miracle never be repeated? Are we poorer because Christ has left this world and gone to the Father?

The hem of Christ's garment may still be

touched, for the hem may well be used to figure anything through which Christ may pass to us. All that is beautiful in the world is the channel through which the virtue of God passes into the lives of men and women. Only through the visible can men touch the invisible.

II. Let us think of some of the ways in which we can touch the hem of His garment and in our touch find healing.

1. Well, there is in His Word the hem of Christ's garment. It is for us to keep in mind that the hem stands for the visible thing by which we get into touch with the invisible, that by means of which the virtue of Christ passes into the soul. Christ's word is the hem of His garment, and countless thousands have felt His power pass from Him into them by the use of His inspired Word. The Bible is more than a book; it is the hem of the garment of the great personality which became flesh and dwelt among us. Some years ago at a Northfield Conference, one Saturday evening I attended a meeting, in which men reclaimed from sin related their experiences. Among them was a very attractive man who is to-day a prominent man of business in the city of New York. He told how one night in his room in a hotel, suffering from the effects of drink and other sins, he made up his mind to end his life by throwing himself into the East River. While revolving his plans his eyes fell upon a book. It was the Bible. At first he shrank from it, but after a little he opened it and

from its pages Christ spoke to his sinful and troubled soul. His suicidal impulse died away and he went out and sought and found Christ as his Saviour. He had brushed against the hem of Christ's garment and was saved.

Doctor Clow tells of marching with a sad little company of his people through a cemetery. They were on their way to the burial of a loved one. As they went along a pathway they read this inscription on a stone,—

“He was such a man as, take him for all in all,
I shall not soon look upon his like again.”

As the mourning company read the lines the feeling was that there are times when Shakespeare is not enough. A few yards further along they came to a simple slab and on it these words: “Because I live, ye shall live also.” The preacher writes that immediately the faces of the bereaved men and women perceptibly brightened. They had touched the hem of Christ's garment and were healed. So at all times we can touch the hem of Christ's garment,—when we are tempted, when we are in darkness, when we need comfort, when our hope of immortality grows dim, when we, like this woman of the Gospel story, have suffered much and lost all. In our need, whatever it may be, we have only to apply to the soul some great word from this book, and we shall come to newness of life. Often it is only a single word, but it comes to us with all Christ's power to bless. Run over

in your minds a few of the precious utterances of the Book: "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

"The healing of His seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain;
We touch Him in life's throng and press,
And we are whole again."

2. In the church with its ministries there is the hem of His garment.

By the church I mean its beautiful buildings with the truths of God on wall and window and in spoken word. By its ministries I mean the worship in song and prayer.

If there be any material thing which the most unspiritual man may see to be the garments of God, it is surely these ministries of the church. They may be dull at times and monotonous, but surely no one can enter into these ministries with real desire and not come from them feeling that virtue has entered into him. The church is a home for the soul, a refuge for the lonely, a resting-place for the weary and the heavy laden.

There are many infirmities that may be healed

through Christ's ministry by means of the church. The Scriptures record many instances of men and women who have found in the temple a blessing. They range all the way from him who sang, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord" to the lame man who was laid at the beautiful gate of the temple and there found healing of soul and body. I wonder that men do not look upon the church as the hem of Christ's garment, by touching which they can find that virtue of the Blessed which every soul needs. All who enter the church and engage in its services with whole heart find that they have indeed touched the hem of Christ's garment to their healing.

3. The sacraments are, in a sense, like to the hem of Christ's garment which the suffering woman touched that day.

I doubt if there be anything that brings the soul nearer to Christ than it is brought in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. There is nothing else which seems to bring into our lives more of His power. Before the Church was organized, before a single word of the New Testament had been written, even before the Old Testament was understood as having its fulfilment in Christ, before the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Jesus took His disciples into an upper room and instituted this sacrament, saying, "Do this in remembrance of me." It is the hem of Christ's garment which all men recognize.

There have been times when there has been cast about it a reverence almost false. Some of our own Scottish ancestors invested it with a solemnity so great and searching that men who deeply felt their unworthiness ran away from it. The Roman Church interpreted it in a way that was false and robbed it of its real power. The Lord's Supper is only a supper, its elements are only signs and symbols; but they are symbols through which Christ channels blessing to the soul that partakes.

If this sacrament is the hem of Christ's garment, if it is the outward thing by means of which Christ's power becomes more real to us and by means of which good comes to men, we are not to run away from it, but to press toward it as the woman of our story pressed toward Christ that she might be healed. The very "words of institution" (1 Cor. 11: 23-28) are words of gracious invitation. They have often been read otherwise. Men have said, "Let a man examine himself and if he finds some sin in his soul, let him stay away." Such is not the meaning of the words of the Lord's servant. Their meaning is this: "Let a man examine himself of his envy, pride, passion, dishonesty, or any other sin that may mar his life, and as he finds his sickness of soul and its issue in shame, so let him eat and be healed."

In closing I would put a question. What sore and shameful thing is this day draining your soul of strength and peace and hope? How many are under the burden of long-continued sins, so that

when they would do good, evil is present with them? who when they would break with some evil habit, find themselves bound with fetters? How many of us are victims of chronic weakness and distrust and have given up our practice of prayer? How many of these other sins are draining our lives of gladness and joy?

The Gospel which I rejoice to bring is, that all may be healed. We may be healed now. We may find our healing in our touch of His garment, in our faith. The healing comes from the Christ. It is by His grace and His power and His cross. These things of which I have been speaking, especially the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, are the borders of His garment through which good comes into our lives.

Therefore if we are conscious of our weakness, as was this afflicted woman, if we wish to be healed, as she wished to be healed, if we wish to be done forever with the old habits of sin that are draining our lives, let us seek the Christ who came to save and lay hold upon Him. Let us seek Him by the help of these tangible and visible things which are as His garment, and we shall find His power coming into our lives, hear Him saying to us as He said to the woman whom He healed that day so long ago, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole." And having heard Him we shall enter into peace.

VI

A MESSAGE TO THE NEEDY

Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.—JOHN 20: 16.

IN giving a series of evening addresses on the above theme, it is proposed to study it under these headings, "A Message to the Needy," "A Message to the Doubter," and "A Message to the Perplexed." It is said in Mark that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils. Naturally the question arises, Why appear first unto her? We would have expected Him to appear first unto one of His disciples. Indeed He might have shown Himself first to one of those who accomplished His death. That He came first to Mary Magdalene would seem to be because her need was very great and He would bring comfort and cheer to her fearful and heavy heart.

Mary is one of the most interesting characters connected with our Lord's ministry. She has a large place in Christian literature. She was called Magdalene after the town from which she came. The word Magdala, the name of the town of her birth, means "a watch-tower," and some one has

suggested that in the name there is that which was prophetic of Mary of Magdala. As a watch-tower she was to stand and bear testimony to the resurrection of her Lord.

But even more interesting than her personal history was the fact that Jesus came first to her, and when we consider that fact in the light of her past life in its relations to Christ we can gather some things helpful to ourselves as we think of the ministry of our risen Lord.

I. Her life serves to show how deep a human life may sink.

It may seem a harsh thing to say, but it is true and not hard to prove, that when a woman turns to the paths of evil she becomes the worst sinner in the world. The average woman is a little better than the average man, but we are reminded of the saying of the wise Solomon, "A man among a thousand have I found, but a woman among a thousand have I not found." The common morality of women is higher than that of men. They seem to be naturally more religious. They respond more readily to the appeal of the Gospel. In fact, the majority of professing Christians in the world are women. From this it is not to be argued that Christianity is effeminate, but only that women generally are more ready to accept the Gospel. But when a woman does depart from the paths of righteousness, her descent is more rapid and her degradation more awful. Mary Magdalene belonged to this latter class. She is said to have

been possessed of seven devils, which is not to be taken necessarily as a definite number, for seven is the Hebrew number for completeness, and it probably means that Mary was completely under the domination of the evil one. She had probably sunk so low that she had become what we now term a degenerate. Like the fabled poisoned maiden of the Greeks, whoever came near her found her breath to be blight and death.

It would be interesting to know the cause of her downfall. It is probable that there was some false soul, who made a promise to her ear and broke it to her heart. This is the explanation of the downfall of most women who go in the ways of sin. It may have been due to poverty. Recent investigation on the part of the Vice Commission of Chicago showed that insufficient wages was the greatest single cause in the downfall of women.

I digress to speak of this because I realize that the virtue of the nation will never rise higher than that of its women. Women and not men are the safeguards of the virtuous living and domestic purity of our land. It seems to me that the message which Christianity has to offer is twofold:

First, that a living wage must be demanded by every girl who must work for her living.

Second, that the Church insist upon a single standard of morals.

But here one thing stands out, one thing as to which there can be no question, the awful depths to which a human soul may sink.

II. We see also in her experience that there is no condition beyond the power of Christ to heal.

The old hymn puts the truth in familiar words, "Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal." So earth has no sin that Christ cannot heal. Mary's life apparently was completely mastered by Satan. No soul more hopeless than hers could possibly have been found in the whole realm of Palestine. The only other that could approach her was the woman of Samaria, and Jesus healed them both. If there were hope and salvation for her, there are hope and salvation for all. We never get so low as to be beyond His love. He was the friend of Publicans and sinners. None are so bad as to be beyond the purposes of His death. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the world. No life is so wicked as to be beyond the reach of His redeeming power. If He could redeem Mary, He can redeem us. No one has wandered so far away that he cannot come back. Sometimes men and women get to the place where they feel, as did Macbeth in Shakespeare's great tragedy, "It is better to go on than to turn back." That is never true. It is always better to go back. Christ is greater than all our sins. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Earth has no sin that Christ cannot cure.

III. We see in Mary's experience that Jesus comes first to those who need Him most.

I think that to be the real reason why Christ ap-

peared first to Mary. She needed Him most and He knew that she needed Him most. There is no more beautiful story in the Scriptures than this story in John's Gospel of Christ's appearing first to Mary Magdalene. She lingered longest at the grave. When the disciples and other friends of Jesus found the empty tomb, they were satisfied, but she was not. Nothing but Christ could ease her troubled heart. When the others had gone, she stooped and looked into the grave and saw two angels. The others did not see the angels, but Mary did. Where the need is greatest angels come. Where the heart's longing for Christ is deepest, He comes as He came to Mary. Jesus ever reveals Himself most clearly to those who need Him most. Mrs. Bacon, of Georgia, who was looking over the relics of a son who had died, found among them a stone picked up near Oberammergau, and on the stone she saw clearly outlined the face of the Christ. Of this stone she had a photograph made, the likeness being wonderfully lifelike. A copy of this photograph hangs in my home. On the back of the original photograph Mrs. Bacon has written these words, "Christ reveals Himself most clearly to those who need Him most."

Why did Mary need Him most? It had been only a little while since the evil spirits had been cast out of her. She was still subject to temptation. The demons themselves might return. She was a new convert. She needed not only the for-

givenness; she needed also the power. Nothing less than a living and present Christ could guarantee to her safety and protection from sin. If we be reconciled to God by the death of His Son, we shall be saved by His life. There is a lesson here for us all. The most needy people on earth are often new converts. Men and women who have just thrown off the shackles of sin, who desire to do good but find evil ever present with them, in such is a great and urgent need. The danger is the re-assertion of the power of old habits. We ought to take a definite interest in new converts. It is not a hard thing to win men to Christ; but it is a hard thing to keep them won. The close of every church year, like this one, as we go over our roll, brings us face to face with the sad fact that some have gone back and walk with us no more. They have forsaken us because they love this present world. Our responsibility for them is very great, and it hurts one's heart to realize that some have drifted away. Jesus came first to this new convert. It was in the same spirit in which He later spoke to Peter in the familiar words, "Feed my lambs." In His approach to this needy one, He called her by name, a single word, but full of love and meaning, "Mary." He knows us each by name. The myriad saints of God, He names them all. We sometimes find it difficult to name those with whom we have often associated. People in this world sometimes lose their identity altogether. Only yesterday I read the gruesome item of news,

that the body of some thirty unidentified dead in our city morgue had been reduced to ashes, after having been kept the length of time required by law, three years, I believe. If, after that length of time, they remain unclaimed, they are cremated. It is possible in this world to die unknown and to have no one care; but there is not a life that Christ does not know. "He calleth his own sheep by name."

IV. Mary's experience illustrates also that one's past life of sin may be the means of keeping one close to Christ.

There are at least three ways in which the memory of the past life of sin may prove a blessing:

First, this memory tends to keep us close to Christ. There are some who may be indifferent Christians, but the life that has trodden the dark way, that has known the power and faced the peril of sin, that sort of life keeps closest to Christ. This fact may account for what seems to be a deep spirituality and earnestness in those who have been lifted from the lowest depths of sin and shame.

Second, the memory of the past forgiveness often develops the deepest love for the Master and the most intense longing for His presence and joy in fellowship with Him.

Third, the memory of past forgiveness often makes us most faithful witnesses to the Master. It is a significant fact that Jesus gave Mary something to do. That she might have an antidote for

the poison of temptation that would come to her, He said, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God."

Let us see in this woman what sin unrestrained will do. Let us see in her Christ's power to save unto the uttermost all that come unto Him. And, finally, let the memory of our past sins keep us close to Christ.

VII

A MESSAGE TO THE DOUBTER

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

—JOHN 20: 27.

IT is not possible to say anything new concerning this familiar scene of the meeting of Jesus and Thomas, in which we find the disciple transformed from skepticism into rapturous confession of trust and loyalty. It is a significant thing, however, that John makes this story the climax of his Gospel. The chapter is written to prove the resurrection, and here he reaches the very summit of his argument. His object in it all is to prove that Christ is God and Saviour. "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." The conviction of Thomas as to the resurrection of Jesus was, as John regarded it, the final and necessary proof that would convince all men that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. Of Thomas we must think as representing a class, just as we think of Peter or Mary as representing a class. Thomas stands for that class of men whom we look upon as skeptics, or

doubters, honest doubters, however, whose desire is to come out of the mists of uncertainty into the full light of conviction. Christ here deals with such a doubter. In His words, therefore, we are to find that which is for the help of a class and not for the help of one man merely.

Christ's message to the doubter is certainly a timely message in these days which, because of their troubles and their problems, seem to foster doubt. It is my desire, I am sure, to make this a timely message.

The doubt of Thomas was concerning the greatest thing in the world, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. When the proofs of that resurrection were furnished him, his whole attitude and spirit were changed. Rapturous confession sprang to his lips and ever afterwards he bore eloquent and convincing testimony to the vital fact of our religion. In his experience we may find a clear path for our feet into the cheering light of perfect trust.

I. Let us, first of all, look for a little at this man who doubted.

Thomas was of a peculiar type of mind. He might be called a rationalist. His temperament we feel in his words, "Except I see, I shall not believe." The same thing is manifest in earlier experiences. When Jesus would go again into Judea for the help of the sisters of the dead Lazarus, despite the assurances that no harm would come, Thomas felt that the worst would happen, for his words were, "Let us also go, that we may die with

him." Those are not the words of a coward, but of a man who looked ever upon the dark side of things and doubted that good would come. On a later occasion when Jesus spoke of going away, referring to His death, the words of Thomas are, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" So when the body of Jesus was laid in the tomb of Joseph in the garden, and then a little later came the glad word that He had risen, the disciples gathered in the upper room to rejoice, but Thomas goes away by himself to nurse his grief and disappointment. The other disciples must have felt that it was a mistake for Thomas to forego the delights of the fellowship and worship of that upper room. It is neither wise nor right to give way to one's doubt. It is our plain duty to wait upon the services of the Church even though inclination be otherwise. There are times when we feel that we would prefer to be alone and nurse our troubles, but the words of the old story apply, "I being in the way, the Lord led me." It is in the worship of God's house and in fellowship with His people that God still makes approach to men. It is still as it was with those of old, Samuel, and David, and Isaiah, and finally to the man of our story, Thomas the doubter.

When told by the other disciples that Jesus was risen, the reply of Thomas was almost an angry one: "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not

believe." It is proper enough to demand convincing proof, but it is not right that we lay down certain conditions on which alone we will believe and demand that God meet those conditions. It is our duty to ask God to make things clear. It is not right to say that unless God does certain things we will not believe; for in so doing we are seeking to limit God and possibly bringing harm to ourselves. Sometimes we hear people say, "I have asked God to do a certain thing, and if He does it, I will believe." If God fails to do as such people ask, then they lose faith. It is a wrong course. It was wrong of Thomas, and he realized the wrong of it as soon as he saw the Master. When Jesus bade him thrust his hand into His side, he did not do it, but cried out, "My Lord and my God."

Concerning men like Thomas there are two things to be said in extenuation, things which will make us more charitable in our judgment of them. Thomas was of a temperament that entertained doubt, and ought not to be censured too severely for his fault. On the other hand he is to be commended because he returned to the upper room and thus put himself where Christ might show Himself to him and take away his doubts.

II. Christ's dealing with the doubter.

Jesus condescended to come back on the second Sabbath evening, and this He apparently did for the specific purpose of convincing Thomas. This would seem to be the meaning of the fact that the only conversation recorded is that with Thomas.

In passing, it may be pointed out that already the change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week had taken place, and this, doubtless, received the sanction of the Master. On this evening of the second Lord's Day the disciples were gathered together as they had been the week before, only this time Thomas was with them. The lesson is plain. If we have doubts, it is better for us still to go to church and to identify ourselves with God's people, even though we be without their faith in the things which are taught and done. The wisdom of this was felt by one of the old saints of God, who in an hour of trouble expressed himself in simple lines:

“Thy saints are comforted,
I know, and seek Thy house of prayer;
I, therefore go where others go,
Though I find no comfort there.”

Then if we are still inclined to criticize Thomas we need to remember that the Master did not criticize him. He sympathized enough with the poor fellow to come back that He might reveal Himself, ready even to meet the conditions which Thomas laid down, that he might see and feel the wounds in hands and side. Though Thomas had said that he would not believe unless Christ should do this, he was convinced without it.

III. Doubt changed to rapturous faith.

Apparently without looking at the wounds of nails and spear Thomas cried out in full conviction,

“My Lord and my God.” Jesus said to him, not only as to the doubts of the past but as well with the trials of the future in mind, “Be not faithless, but believing.” In other words, his exhortation was that he never give way to unbelief. Yield to faith and not to doubt, even give to faith the benefit of the doubt. There is vital truth here in connection with all Christian experience. In reference to the future, as I have just said, the words of Jesus to Thomas were, “Be not faithless;” that is, do not give way to unbelief but cling to your Master, for faith is more than intellectual assent to a creed or a system. It is personal trust in Christ. Jesus said to Thomas, “No matter what comes, hold on to that trust.” The vital point is this: we all have our doubts, some of the bitterest kind, but victory over them lies not in yielding to the doubts but to such faith as we have. “The bruised reed he will not break, the smoking flax he will not quench.” That was the secret of the victory of Job, who, in the midst of his manifold trials, exclaimed, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” That likewise was the secret of the father of the demoniac boy. He came to Jesus, saying, “If thou canst, help my boy.” Jesus said, “If thou canst believe.” The man did not believe much about Christ, but he yielded to such faith as he had, and prayed, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” It was by living up to the small faith that he had, and not by allowing his lack of faith to keep him back, that he won life for his boy and

for himself. So the Master laid down a law that applies to all Christians. Act upon such faith as we have and not upon our doubts, and we shall come through to victory. "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself."

This truth, I take it, finds its expression in the last of the beatitudes of Jesus, "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." Few were privileged to see the risen Christ in the flesh, but through the Christian centuries countless thousands without having seen yet have loved. The belief is based on sufficient evidence, and then it becomes a personal experience of life through trust in Jesus Christ.

IV. Doubt turned to testimony.

Concerning the after life of Thomas there are certain traditions. One of them is—and surely it may be believed—that his own experience of transformation from doubt to faith he used to bring many another soul out of darkness into light, for the traditions go on to say that as he went with the other disciples preaching Jesus and the resurrection, he met many who, like the Greeks, scoffed at the story. To such Thomas told in simple terms the story of his own experience and convinced them of the truth of the story that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. The supreme testimony to the truth of the teachings of the Christian religion is that of experience. Only a few weeks ago I was in conversation with one who frankly disavowed

all belief in prayer. I made no attempt to argue with him. I only told him of a personal experience in which there was striking answer to prayer. That one experience seemed to satisfy him.

Let me say, then, in closing, that the final proof of the risen Lord to those who doubt is the testimony of the life that is risen with Christ, the life lifted from the mire of sin and established upon the sure foundation of righteousness.

There is one final lesson we would do well to learn from this experience of Thomas, for we shall all have our times of doubt and perplexity. We may be experiencing such hours now, but do not give way to them and do not be impatient in them. That week preceding this experience of Thomas must have seemed a century in length, but he waited day after day, then took his place among the disciples of Jesus and his Lord came. Sometimes we can only wait. "If the vision tarry, wait for it." Said the Psalmist, "Be still, and know that I am God." It is well to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God, and if in patience we wait, we shall find, as did this doubter of long ago, that though sorrow endures for a night, joy cometh in the morning.

VIII

A MESSAGE TO THE PERPLEXED

And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.

—LUKE 24: 15.

THE ministry of our Lord in the forty days following His resurrection was not in constant fellowship with His disciples, but in occasional appearances. By what principle, if any, was Jesus guided in these occasional appearances? A close study will serve to show us. It would seem that He disappeared and reappeared not in any arbitrary way, but according to the call of great need on the part of His disciples. In every instance we find that He came to meet some special and urgent need. It was to the troubled Mary that He came, to the doubting Thomas, and to the penitent Peter. Now He appears to these two perplexed disciples as, on their way to Emmaus, they communed together and were sad.

Upon this principle Christ works still, for while He is ever present with His disciples and, in fact, in His disciples by the Spirit, He is specially and most conspicuously present where hearts need Him most. This is the real explanation of the words spoken for the help of Paul, "My grace is sufficient

for thee." That is to say, however great the need may be the presence of Christ and the bestowal of His grace will meet that need. The words of our text, then, lead us to think of our Lord's ministry to the perplexed.

Who these men were we do not know certainly. They were not of the apostles, but belonged to the larger circle of the believers in Jesus. One was Cleopas, whose wife ministered to Jesus as one of His earlier followers, and it is probable that she led her husband to Christ. The name of the other man is not given, hence there can be no certainty as to his identity. Some are of the opinion that he was Luke himself, and there is some ground for this opinion. It would seem that only an eye-witness could tell the story in such minute detail. Indeed, he may here have received the inspiration which led him to write the Gospel which bears the name of Luke, for we read here that "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." When later Luke wrote his Gospel he declares that his object is to set forth in order the things concerning Christ as the Saviour. At all events we have a beautiful picture in this scene, that while they walked together, one being more hopeful and the other somewhat dejected, Christ should come and join them. How true to this experience is that of every disciple. In some moment that is darkest there comes and stands by him or walks with him the Son of God. We think of the

experience of Paul in the time of his greatest perplexity as to where he should go. Christ gives him a vision that calls him into Macedonia. In another dark hour, when the whole way seemed uncertain, Christ again comes to him in a vision, saying, "Be of good cheer, Paul." There are some suggestions gleaned from this incident of which I wish to speak.

I. It is a good thing to let the perplexed heart pour out its tale of woe to the full, for the very telling brings with it relief.

"Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak
Whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break."

One cannot but be impressed with the patient way in which Jesus allowed these two troubled men to pour into His ears their own story of hope giving way to doubt, its being rekindled, and going out at length into utter darkness. Why did He delay when He could instantly have cleared the matter? The answer is not far to seek. The telling of a thing is often in itself a comfort to the troubled heart. It is a lesson that we need to learn, that we be patient as we listen to the stories of woe poured into our ears. There are people who suffer great grief and tell their story to all they meet. With such we are tempted to be impatient, but let us remember that the very telling of the story brings relief to the burdened heart. It is well, therefore, to learn to be patiently sympathetic at the recital of another's woes. This patience was character-

istic of Jesus. We see it manifested all through His life. He was a patient listener as well as a good talker. When people came to Him with their troubles, He did not rebuke them, but allowed them to pour out to Him the fullness of their stories, and then He spoke words of comfort and inspiration. The first lesson, therefore, is that we go to the Master with our troubles and in the fullest way pour out our hearts to Him whose ears are opened unto our cries and whose heart beats responsive to our needs.

II. We learn, too, by holding on to the little faith we have in the midst of our perplexities.

It is a significant thing that while these men had lost faith in the Messiahship of Christ and had lost faith too in His resurrection, they still believed that He was a good man. Even more than that, they believed Him to be "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people." While they had abandoned faith in Christ's resurrection and even in His Messiahship, they had not abandoned faith in His character. No matter what perplexities may be in our minds as to Christ, honest doubts as to His deity and His virgin birth, if we accept the genuineness of His character as a good man and are open-hearted to the truth, we shall come at length to believe all the teachings concerning Him. Most of us are familiar with the religious history of Horace Bushnell. He had lost faith in the deity of Christ, but sat down to make a study of His character, still believing in His goodness. He

undertook to write on the matchless character of Christ. He ended by writing to show His belief in the deity and kingship of Christ, that "the character of Jesus forbids His possible classification with men."

Moreover, it is a vital principle of religion to hold on to what we believe no matter how small that faith is. To one of the seven churches of Asia Jesus said, "Strengthen that which remains and which is ready to die." He said too, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed." He showed by several conspicuous examples that men like the father of the boy possessed with demons, the man who said, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief," that the man who acts on faith no matter how small finds that faith itself a growing thing with vast possibilities leading to triumphant victory. The men who in their perplexity said that He was a prophet mighty before God and man came at length to say, "He is our Lord," and to tell of His resurrection.

III. We should learn from the example of the Master that the best way to clear up difficulties is to turn to the Word of God which is "a light unto our path and a lamp unto our feet," for the record is that Jesus turned to the Scriptures and "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself," and showed how it behooved Christ to suffer and die that He might enter into His glory. As He opened to them the Scriptures they

said that their hearts burned within them. An honest, intelligent perusal of the Word of God will clear away most of the difficulties of life and bring light to the perplexed and troubled soul. We cannot refrain from pausing to say a word as to the value of the Bible in days like our own, in solving the perplexities of our day as well as the bringing of light to the individual puzzled soul. There is a revival of interest in the study of the Word to-day that we may understand the signs and significance of our times. An honest study of the Scriptures will reveal this, that while we may have peace and safety, so long as there is sin in the world and men lift up their heads against God's will and ignore His purposes and laws, we may expect wars and rumours of war. On the other hand, only when the world comes to accept the will of Christ, not only in its individual life but in its international relations, may we expect wars to cease.

What is true of our age is true of the individual life. There is no experience of the soul that does not find a parallel in the experience of the writers of the Scriptures. Some years ago I read a work entitled "The Psalms in Human Life." In it the writer makes this very point, that David and other writers of the Psalms had run the whole round of human experience and that not a mood possessed the soul, from the deepest grief to the most exultant joy, but that the same mood is found expressed in the Psalms. What is true of that great book of the Bible is even more true of the Word

as a whole. There is no phase of experience to which we cannot find a parallel and gain help and comfort when we turn to the Word as did the Master.

IV. If we open our hearts to Christ and hold on to Him in the midst of all perplexities, He will turn our darkness into light and our dejection into glorious enthusiasm. Here these men stood at the parting of the ways. They were not sure as to who this visitor was, but they found help in His words. He made as though He would have gone further, but they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." The sequel is not known, but a great lesson to be found in it is this, that the opening of the heart to Christ and holding on to Him will not only clear up our difficulties but will transform our troubles into joy and enthusiasm.

It may be noted, too, that Christ as a perfect gentleman does not force Himself on people. He made as though He would go further and they had to invite Him to stay. That is true still with all the possibilities of light and joy that are to be found in Christ. These are ours only when we open our hearts and constrain Him to come in that He may abide with us.

After all, that which cleared up their difficulties and gave to them the burning heart and a deep and satisfying conviction was not so much what the Master said as it was the Master Himself. It is the genius of Christ that He has the power to stir

in the souls of men a latent ambition and enthusiasm, that He has power to make the heart burn. When Hazlitt, the English essayist and critic, was a young man, the poet Coleridge came to the Hazlitt home to visit the father of the future essayist. On his departure young Hazlitt walked several miles with Coleridge. In one of his essays he tells of the conversation that he had with Coleridge and all that the walk meant to him. The spirit of the poet made the world new to him, gave a new radiance to the sunset, put a new and finer note into the song of the bird. It was not the words of the poet that did so much, but the poet himself. So Christ, if we open our hearts to Him, can by His gracious presence stir in us powers and enthusiasms which will make us something of what these men became, convincing witnesses of Christ's resurrection and power. This ability to awaken enthusiasm in others is one of the marks of a great man and is found preëminently in Christ. Lord Roselynn in his "Life of Napoleon," tells us that even after Napoleon's defeat and in the days of his imprisonment on St. Helena all who came into contact with him were roused to great enthusiasm. The hearts of men burned within them as they talked with the great Corsican. It was not the talk; it was the man behind the talk. Even so, greater than anything that has been written about Christ, greater even than the inspired words of the Scriptures which testify of Him, is the presence of Christ Himself to waken into life our dormant talents

and to send us out to be eloquent and powerful witnesses to Him. There are many instances that might be cited in illustration of this truth. Only one need be given. The only explanation of such a character and life as that of Dwight L. Moody is that the man in a large way opened his heart to Christ, took Him in His fullness, and Christ not only dispelled all doubts but developed him into one of the most gracious and powerful evangelists of the last century. As the presence of some great artist stirs in one the artistic instinct, and as fellowship with a military genius stirs the martial spirit, so the presence of Christ stirs within us the possibilities of what we may become and what we may be for Him, and sends us out to be evangelists to perplexed and troubled hearts. He makes it possible for us to share the experiences and the privileges of these first disciples, to say that we too have seen the Lord and that our hearts burned within us as He talked with us and opened to us in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

IX

HEROIC WOMANHOOD

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.—LUKE 1:30.

LUKE, more than any other Gospel writer, records the varied and loving ministries of women. The reasons for this are interesting. By profession Luke was a physician, and in the work of his profession came into close touch with the lives of women. Again, when he was with Paul on his missionary journeys, Paul left him to act as pastor of the church at Philippi, a church which, it will be recalled, had its birth in a meeting for prayer. Those who arranged and carried on that meeting by the riverside were women. The best known of these women was Lydia, who doubtless influenced the life of Luke. Then, too, Luke was a man of chivalrous nature. He was writing his Gospel for humanity, and naturally and properly women and children are given their place. Luke alone gives the songs of the three women, Anna, Elizabeth, and Mary. He alone speaks of Susanna and Joanna, who ministered to our Lord of their substance. It is Luke alone who gives us that touching story of the nameless woman who bathed the feet of Jesus with her tears and wiped

them with the hairs of her head. He tells, too, of the widows of Sarepta and Nain. His Gospel opens with the song of a woman and closes with the picture of the faithful women coming before the break of day to the sepulcher that they might anoint the body of Jesus.

It is not a matter of wonder, therefore, that he tells us more than any other of her who was most highly favoured of God, Mary the mother of our Lord. We probably have undervalued Mary because the Church of Rome has gone to the extreme of exalting her to a throne equal to, if not above, that of her Son, offering unto her a worship which in its essence is idolatry. Because we feel that there has been an extreme on one side we need to be careful lest we go to an extreme on the other and fail to value Mary as we ought. Surely we ought not to fail to honour her who found such favour with God. She must ever be regarded as God's ideal, a type of heroic womanhood. God made her His instrument for bringing His Son into the world because she had found favour in His sight. In her life we find certain qualities which made it fitting that she be chosen to become the mother of the Holy One. In a study of the life and character of Mary we can find not only an ideal wife and mother, but as well learn what we owe to our mothers as this finds illustration in the profound devotion of Jesus to her who bore Him.

What were the things in her character which caused her to find favour with God? The answer

to this question will be the burden of the message this morning.

I. Her life was marked by a deep and quiet spirit of submission to God. Her becoming the mother of Jesus, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, meant, for a time at least, the loss of her good name. There was a time when her friends and even her affianced husband questioned her character. Joseph, we read, was minded to put her away. Through all her life she was reproached of those who did not believe the story of the birth of Jesus. Yet facing all this, fully realizing what it meant, her answer to the angel was, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." This conception of herself as a handmaid of the Lord is one of the most beautiful conceptions of the Christian life, and that whether it be the life of a man or a woman, for the word "handmaid" means a servant who stands at the right hand of master or mistress ready to serve. The Psalmist puts it, "As the eyes of a maiden look unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God." No more beautiful tribute can be paid to any woman than to say of her that she was a handmaid of the Lord, nor to any man than to say that he was a servant of God.

The spirit of submission which is so marked in Mary is seen not only in her reception of the angel's message. It is seen again at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, where she said to the servants, speaking of her Son, "Whatsoever he saith unto

you, do it." Though the honoured mother of Jesus, she bowed in implicit obedience to His commands, a spirit which brings any life into favour with God and makes it of value in the service of God. This same spirit was in her through all the years. She gave quiet submission to the will of God for herself and for her Son, suffering Him to go out to His high ministry, realizing that soon He must meet the inevitable cross. Her spirit was that of submissive service, and service ever marks motherhood. Who more than a mother attains unto the standard of greatness which Christ set up: "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant"?

II. Mary's life was one of genuine goodness.

She is called the Virgin, which is but another term for purity. It must have been her real piety which, more than anything else, caused her to find favour with God. Assuming the necessity for the incarnation, there were but two ways in which Christ could come into the world, by creation or by birth. That He might possess a true human nature and so identify Himself fully with the needs of humankind, it was necessary for Him to be "born of a woman." Of the descendants of David God would select for such an office none but one of the most exalted character and purest life. This God would do not only that the Son of Man might be of honourable birth among men, but as well that He be properly reared and trained. Surely, then, that home in Nazareth must have been an ideal

home, and, as in most homes, its atmosphere was created by the mother. I have sometimes thought—and I say it with reverence—that that home in Nazareth must have been like that in which the great Lincoln grew up. It was like it in its poverty, and like it too because the dominant influence was that of the mother. Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus, would seem to have been only an ordinary man. Some have seen in his life something of shiftlessness. Like the father of Lincoln, he seems to have moved from place to place. It was his mother who so trained him that he increased in wisdom and in favour with God and man. Doubtless it was the mother, too, who instructed the boy Jesus in the law and wisdom of the Old Testament, and how well she performed her task is evident from the fact that as a boy of twelve Jesus astonished by His knowledge the doctors in the temple. I believe that, speaking after the manner of men, the gracious spirit and gentleness which marked the character and life of Jesus were due to the instruction and example of a godly mother. Even as a boy there was that in His life which caused Him to find favour with men. He must have been a gentlemanly boy, and we know Him to have been a true gentleman when He became a man. His consideration for women and His kindness to children, His appreciation of beauty in bird and flower, these He must have learned from His mother. Teachers tell us in our own day that it is not difficult to reason as to the character of the homes from which

their pupils come. In its simple and winsome beauty the early life of Jesus gives evidence of the godliness of His home and the genuine goodness of His mother. There is no finer heritage that we can give to our children than that of godly parental instruction and example. It is beyond question that nearly all the great of earth have attributed their greatness in achievement, and especially in character, to a godly father or mother, either or both. We conclude, therefore, that it was the sterling worth of this woman that caused her to find favour with God.

III. Consideration for others was also a marked characteristic of Mary's life.

Take, for example, her conduct at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. She was only a guest and yet when she saw that the obligations of hospitality were about to break down, she took in the situation and acted for relief. That the poverty of the home might not be exposed, and also that the embarrassment of the host might be relieved, she slipped from the room and spoke to Jesus, saying, "They have no wine." Then she goes to the servants and tells them that whatever He commands they are to do. All this was done from something higher than a sense of duty. She was not responsible for the situation, but with quiet consideration for the feelings of others she did what she could to interest her Son that He might use His power to bring about a change in the unfortunate situation.

We see this same consideration manifested later

in Capernaum. There Jesus was preaching and through all the day the crowds pressed upon Him so that He had no time to eat or rest. With a mother's solicitation she sent a messenger with the request that He spare Himself. The incident has often been interpreted as one which showed lack of faith on Mary's part, to indicate that she even questioned the sanity of Jesus. That question did arise in the minds of His brethren (we find it in the fifth chapter of John), but it never found a place in Mary's mind. The incident described by John is wholly different from the one which took place at Capernaum. There Mary was the active one and her whole activity was prompted by her consideration for others, and especially for her Son. Thus wherever we see her we find evidence of unselfish consideration for others. That ever marks parent-hood, and more particularly motherhood. On the seal of one of the insurance companies of America there is a picture of a mother bird in deadly combat with a serpent which has been trying to destroy the young birds in the nest. Underneath the picture are these words, "We live and die for those we love." It has always seemed to me that this is the very spirit of motherhood, to live for others, and, if need be, to die for others. The true mother, like the Lord Himself, comes not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give her life a ransom for others.

IV. In Mary there was a quiet heroism that caused her to find favour with God.

It is true that she was most highly honoured of women, and that all generations shall call her blessed, yet her honour and glory were not without pain and sacrifice. There is nothing more remarkable than her heroic self-control as she faced the most trying situations in life. For one thing she restrained herself when she was eager to speak. Of Christ, at least in His early life, she knew more than any one else. She had been visited by the shepherds who told her of the song of the angels. It was to her, guided by the star in the east, that the wise men came with their gifts. She presented Jesus in the temple, when the old prophet Simeon and the prophetess Anna, inspired of God, pronounced Him the chosen of Heaven. When He was being denounced as a false prophet and accused of fanaticism, how her heart must have strained to the bursting point in her desire to tell the things she had heard. "But his mother kept all these sayings in her heart." We can scarcely realize how hard it must have been to hold her peace when her Son's character was questioned, when her own virtue was at stake, yet, like her Son, she opened not her mouth. Then how she suffered, too, because she could not fully understand this strange child who had been so strangely given. I have sometimes thought that here is one of the most trying experiences of a mother, the realization that to her son have been given opportunities and talents beyond her gift, such indeed as will make it impossible for her to understand to the full the

thoughts that are given to him. This is not always true as to ordinary children. It was true of Jesus. In this, too, we have one of the difficulties which must be faced by those who instruct youth and by that class of women whom we call stepmothers. These latter in many instances deserve an appreciation equal to that of the real mother. When in the providence of God the mother is taken from her child and another comes to take her place, she must be the real mother with two difficulties added, namely, that her place is not so easy, and her understanding of those whom she would mother not so instinctive. We would not fail to place upon the brow of a stepmother, so called, but who is a mother in reality, the garland wreath of honour which is her due when having taken another's place, she brings up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Again, how quietly did this mother suffer as she saw her Son go out into the world, realizing, as she did very early in His life, that He was soon to be in the thick of the hard battle of life and she could not be with Him. How keen must have been her suffering as she saw Him buffeted, persecuted, misunderstood, and maligned! Her suffering must have been second only to His as she realized how He had come to His own and His own received Him not, as she saw Him despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Then how marvellous was her self-restraint as she stood that day at the cross. She witnessed the

crucifixion of her boy, she saw the agony of it all. She stood so near the cross and its victim that she could hear His dying whisper, "Woman, behold thy son." Her heart was broken that day at the foot of the cross even as the heart of Jesus was broken on it. Yet there was no wild grief, no lamentation and wailing in which some indulge in trying hours. Though her heart was breaking, she heroically controlled herself, wore her sack-cloth within, and bore, with that dignity which made her the worthy mother of her Son, the woe of the most awful tragedy in all the world's history. There is no heroism in the world to-day, in this tragic time of war, greater than the heroism of women, especially of mothers. The other day a gentleman said that next to the boys in the trenches those who are doing most to win the war are women, those who are the mothers and wives and sisters and sweethearts of our soldiers. I think that all will agree with that statement. The quiet and cheerful spirit in which the women of England are bearing their grief inspired Grace Richmond to write her little story of "The Whistling Mother." But the whistling mother is found in America as well as in England. We have already seen this heroism in the mothers who have been called upon to mourn for their sons and we shall continue to see it. One of the most profound impressions made upon me as I was among the soldiers at Camp Lee was that made by the mothers as they said farewell to sons who had been ordered to cross

the sea. Often these mothers smiled through their tears. I could not but think of those words of this mother of Jesus, "Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." Doctor Giles tells of meeting last summer an English woman who had sent seven sons to France, and some had fallen in battle. With high heroism that mother said, "If I had seven more, I would send them all." Such a spirit as that cannot be defeated, and when this war is over, and victory is ours, this nation will honour more than her soldiers. There will, I hope, be erected somewhere a monument to the heroic spirit and ministry of our splendid American women.

Looking at the story from the standpoint of the son, we see in the attitude of Christ toward His mother what should be our attitude of love and devotion to our mothers. There is a mistaken view that Jesus showed Himself somewhat indifferent to His mother, almost rude. There is no ground for such a view. It seems to have been due to a misunderstanding of His words, "He that doeth the will of my Father, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." The true meaning of those words is almost exactly the opposite of that commonly taken. When Jesus wished to show His profound love for those who did His Father's will, He said that they were to Him like His own mother. It was Christ's highest expression of love, and the lesson of it is to the effect that by doing the will of God we may enter into the

love of Christ even as did His mother. Christ not only honoured her, but His tenderness and chivalry toward all who were in need, women, children, and all unfortunate ones, were the outgrowth of His devotion to His mother. He who has the right feeling toward his own mother will respect womanhood in general; the life and virtue of any woman are safe in the hands of him who honours and loves his mother. The wonderfully tender consideration of Jesus for His mother is seen at its best in the experience of the cross. There in His woe, dying for the world in sin, He did not forget her who had brought Him into the world, but made provision for her care in old age by committing her to the keeping of the youngest and best loved of His disciples: "Son, behold thy mother." "Woman, behold thy son." Of her it was said, "All generations shall call thee blessed." This benediction has fallen on Mary, and not on her only, but on all true women, who, like her, have found favour with God through yielding their lives to Him.

X

THE SOUL'S RETURN AND WELCOME

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

—LUKE 15: 20.

I HAVE spoken of the three great chapters which deal with the story of a soul, its awakening, its hunger, and this the final chapter having to do with the soul's return and welcome. The immediate cause of the return was hunger, the certainty that starvation awaited him unless he made some change. He realized, too, that the one place where he could find food was home, showing, I believe, that there was a lingering consciousness in his heart that there he was still loved, that one place of refuge was open to him in his hunger for food and that deeper hunger of the heart for love. The experience symbolizes the hunger that comes to every soul that is away from God, a hunger that means utter starvation and death of the soul. This dire fate staring him in the face, and the home in the distance with its memories and inviting appeal, lead him to action which is immediate. His reso-

lution once formed is not for a moment abandoned, but carried through to the end. He does not wait for some one to come and take him back, nor until his appearance and condition have been made better. He simply went home as he was and there was welcomed as one who had been dead and was alive again, who had been lost and was found.

The two great facts of the story, the return and the welcome, with their meaning in the life of the soul and its needs, I would deal with this evening.

I. The soul's return.

It is to be observed, first of all, that the action was voluntary. His departure had been willful, his return likewise must be of his own volition. He must act of his own accord. In the beginning of these studies I showed that at this point the parable differs from those of the lost sheep and the lost coin. The shepherd could go after the lost sheep until he would find it. The woman, too, sought her silver until she found it. But the father could not bring back the son; he must act for himself. A beast may be led back, even forced back. A lifeless thing, like a coin, can be mechanically replaced in its former position; but a man is neither a beast nor a lifeless thing. A man is a soul and his will is never forced.

This is in keeping with the teachings of the Scriptures everywhere. God never forces any one back once they have gone away from Him. No one can take you by force and make you a Christian, not even the Almighty God. If by any chance

you are dragged into the outward relationship of a Christian man or woman, your Christianity is not genuine. If you should unite with the Church, accepting the form of godliness merely to please a loving parent, or to conform to the will of a parent whom you fear to defy, your Christianity is plainly spurious. Of course I do not mean any to take from this that a parent should make no effort to lead a child toward Christ and the Church. The child should be required, whether he will or not, to go to the services of the church, especially those of the Sabbath-school, because he is not yet prepared to choose for himself. In this there may be compulsion, but in the matter of becoming a Christian compulsion has no place. That can be only the result of one's own act.

Yet here it must not be overlooked that in a very real sense this father did go after his son. The winged messenger of the father's love followed him through all that perilous and checkered career in the far country. Though the son may not always have realized it, though he may at times have utterly forgotten it, the love of the father followed him and ever and anon rose to consciousness until at length it led him back to the father's house. It followed him like a guardian angel wherever he went. In his sleep it visited him in dreams of the days of childhood. Even in places of vice it sang to him the memories of the days of his innocence. In the lonely and barren places as he fed the swine it must have come to him. When others forsook

him and he was left by the swine-troughs in his filth and his husks and his fever, the father's love did not forsake him. The father's love is the love of the All-Father, of which Jesus said, "Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end." In his hunger this love told him of bread in abundance. When winds were cold, it spoke to him of the robe for his nakedness. In his loneliness it would hold before him the vision of the feast and the fellowship in his father's house. He had thrown away every other part of his inheritance. Here was that which he could not throw away. The father's love is sure to prevail. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" But that love, great and tender as it was, could not force him back. Love is like a child; it can plead, but it cannot compel. Yet its power is in its pleading, in its weakness. To that love the wayward son yields and yielding to that love redeemed him. The teaching as to the life of man in his relations to God is plain. That which makes men Christians is their yielding to the love of God in Christ that God may have His way in their lives.

Again, his return was with free and full confession of sin: "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." When the soul returns to God, it must come in the way of confession; for God has assured us in the words of the apostle, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

“ When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.”

Notice, too, that the prodigal does not seek to throw the blame of his sins on others. He does not say, “ If it had not been for my companions, if it had not been for the peculiar circumstances, if I could only have had a different sort of employment, it would all have been otherwise with me.” But no such excuses does he seek to make. He takes the blame all upon himself: “ I have sinned.”

Moreover he does not strive to lessen his guilt: “ I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight.” He made no attempt to soften or smooth. He did not say, “ Father, you remember my weakness.” He did not by a single word call attention to his peculiar failings and shortcomings. He said only, “ I have sinned.” In our day there is a sickly sentimentality about sin. Sins are spoken of as faults and failings and weaknesses and diseases and wild oats. Let us have sympathy for the sinful soul, considering ourselves lest we also be tempted; but remember that these things which we call by other names are sins, and unless God forgives them they will drown us in perdition. Our wild oats are crimes against God and Heaven, and if we have wandered away, it is not for us to seek to minimize

it, but admit before God that we have sinned, praying with the Psalmist, "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; *for it is great.*"

If God will forgive your sins, your friends will forgive you and will think all the more of you for being manly about this thing and confessing it, and if they do not, their failure will show that they are without the spirit of Christ.

Also it would appear that that which distresses the prodigal most is the enormity of his sin against God. "I have sinned against heaven." He had sinned against himself, against his friends, his home, his opportunities; but his keenest distress arises from the realization of his sin against God. It is the fact that it is against God that makes sin a crime. It is sorrow for sin because of its enormity that constitutes real repentance. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after new obedience."

Once more I would have you note that the confession which he resolved to make was never finished. He had purposed saying, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." Those last words he never said. Before his lips could frame them his father's tears had washed away his sins and he had

kissed them into forgetfulness. He did not complete his confession because he could not. That is one of the remarkable things about an honest confession; it is never finished, but lost in the loving forgiveness of God which overwhelms the sinner. When Nathan's ministry to David brought conviction, David cried, "I have sinned," but got little further, for the prophet spoke saying, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." When Peter went out that night and wept bitterly, he did not finish his confession. He resolved that if ever again he should see his Lord, he would pour out his soul in acknowledgment of his guilt, but no opportunity came until after Jesus had risen from the dead. Then He sent to Peter a message of His love and Peter's soul was filled with peace and joy, the peace and joy which only a consciousness of sin forgiven can bring to the hearts of men and women. Several times Paul seemed about to make confession, but he never got through, for he was lost again and again in the amazing love of God. Once he began by saying, "I am not worthy to be called an apostle, for I persecuted the church"; but he forgot to finish, being conscious of the forgiveness of God in Christ. To use his own words, "It pleased God to reveal his Son in me." Again he wrote, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Beyond this he does not go; confession breaks. The prodigal had this experience, and you, too, have had it.

You have gone to God in prayer to tell Him all your sins and to review before Him their history; but you never finished what you had thought to do, for your thought was lost in the amazing thought of the love of God, the love manifested in His Son, who while we were yet sinners died for us.

II. This leads me to speak, in the second place, of the soul's welcome.

1. He was met by his father before he got home and forgiven and welcomed. I have said that the father could not go after his son and bring him back, that likewise God cannot force a sinner back into fellowship with Him. But while God cannot go after a sinning soul and bring it back, He does go to meet the returning sinner. "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." I want to tell you where God meets the sinner. He meets him at Calvary. That is the long way that God has come to meet the sinner. He meets him there in the death of His Son. The pouring out of the blood of Christ is but the shedding of the tears of God over sin. The death of Christ reveals to us the God who suffers in the straying of men and women into sin. The cross is the meeting ground of the penitent sinner and the loving Father. There the Pilgrim, in Bunyan's allegory, is pictured as losing the load of sin from his weary shoulders. If you will but start home to-night, that is where God will meet you. He will wash you in the blood of the Lamb. He will re-

member your iniquities against you no more forever.

2. The returning sinner received more than he expected in the way of welcome.

All he had asked was that he might be a servant. Instead he was restored to sonship with all the honours and privileges and joys that sonship carries with it. He got more than he had anticipated. What was true as to the prodigal is true as to every sinner who finds his way back to God. All such receive far more than they had hoped or dreamed. In one of his books Doctor W. R. Watkinson has a chapter on "The Surprises of the Christian Life." In it he shows that there will always be glad and joyful surprises awaiting the Christian both in the world which now is and that which is to come. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." This is a hint as to the great and glad surprises that await those who come to God in penitence and faith. They will be surprised at the power of their God, at the joy springing up in their souls like a fountain of pure water, at the love which is lavished upon them. You look back over this year that is gone, and you recall the glad surprises that God gave you and how beyond all expectation was the grace which sustained you in your time of trouble. Not long since a friend told me how wonderfully God had sustained her beneath her burden, how great had been His mercy in the light of her un-

worthiness. In all confidence, therefore, I declare to sinful and sinning men and women, that if you will return to God, you will receive more than you can ever expect or even hope for.

Now precisely the opposite of this is true as to sin. Sin makes its promise to the ear and breaks it to the heart. Sin never fulfills its promises. It never pays one hundred cents on the dollar. You never get from a life of sin what it promised you. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death." Investing in sin is like investing in mining stock—and I speak from experience. Mark Twain said, "A mine is a hole in the ground owned by a liar." That is what sin is. It is a hole owned by the devil who is the father of lies. He tells you that it is rich in precious metals. If you invest in it all that you get is a piece of fancy paper fit only for the children to play with. As to the mine itself, if you go down into it, you suffer a bruised body and come back with a dirty face for your trouble. That is a picture of sin. It is a dark hole in which we are bruised and soiled. It is a disappointment to all who invest. He who serves the world and sin never gets what is promised him, while the trusting and penitent soul is ever surprised at the greatness of God's gifts.

3. The sonship to which the prodigal was restored was a higher one than that which he enjoyed

before he left home. That may not have been the case in the actual experience of this wayward son, but it is the truth as to those who return to God from a life of sin. The spiritual sonship which is through Christ Jesus is higher than the natural sonship of creation. This son was a son in a finer way after his return than he was before he left his father's house to go into the far country. The teachings of the parable are plain: the sinner is God's child, the man who is wandering away from God and who is this hour living in the far country in misery and shame is still a son of God, but when he comes back to God he is a child in a higher sense, with more blessed privileges and more joyful fellowship.

The prodigal was a son before he left his father's house, he was a son during his stay in the far country, but the relationship brought no joy to either father or son. To the father it meant grief rather than joy. But after the return what a difference! Then there was mutual joy in the fellowship of father and son. Sonship is, as I have said, of two kinds. There is natural sonship and there is a sonship which is spiritual. By birth we are all sons of God according to nature, but when we come to God in penitence we are received into the family and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.

It is not, of course, that the son would not have enjoyed this if he had not gone away. It is not that one must sin to appreciate the love of God. It is that despite his sin he was received into as high

favour with his father as though he had been away on some mission of honour, as though he had been a returning conqueror. Mark the badge of sonship showing complete restoration, the robe, the ring, the feast, all go to show how complete was the favour into which he was received.

The robe is the symbol of righteousness. It is that with which all our sins are covered. We are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. The ring is the symbol of favour. The signet ring of the king means that the one permitted to wear it enjoys special favour at the king's hand. So the sinner comes again into the favour of God. His favour is life and His blessing maketh rich and addeth no sorrow therewith.

The sandal or shoe is the symbol of royalty. Only princes wore sandals. "Ye are a royal priesthood, a chosen people." Sinners enter into the aristocracy of God, the only one that is supremely worth while.

4. The welcome was one of joy. The feast is the symbol of joy. Of genuine redemption it is ever true that it is received with joy. This is ever the experience of those whose lives are given us on the pages of the New Testament, men such as those of Samaria and the eunuch of Ethiopia. And how shall I describe the joy of the son, the joy of the homesick soul who has got home? Have you ever been homesick? If you have not, there is something wrong with you. God pity the youth who never gets homesick. If you have been homesick,

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well you know how you felt when you got home again. I remember getting home once after an absence of nearly a year. Everything was dear to my heart. Dear is that home to which the soul comes and dear that hill which lifts one to the storm. Well, such is the joy of a sinner who returns to God. He is at peace with himself, in fellowship with the Father, under no condemnation, for he is in Christ Jesus, and nothing can ever separate him from the love of God.

But if words will not describe adequately the joy of the son, how shall one describe the joy of the father as he realized that this his son who was dead is alive again, that he who was lost has been found. No matter how joyful you have been and are as you are at home with God, the joy of God over the returning sinner is far greater. It is so great that the angels catch the spirit of rejoicing and there is joy in heaven over the sinner that repenteth. You are thinking, it may be, of going home. Joyful anticipation is yours, but more joyful is the anticipation of father and mother as they watch and wait for your return. If you are away from God to-night, will you not bring joy to His heart by going home?

XI

THE HIDDEN BATTLE

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

—EPHESIANS 6: 14-18.

IT is frequently said by our soldiers that the most trying thing in modern warfare is that men are fighting a foe that they cannot see; they are assailed by an enemy who is concealed. Shells coming from points which cannot be determined burst about them. Bullets from hidden rifles whistle by their ears. Bombs dropped from unseen ships of the air scatter death upon them. It is this hidden element that makes modern warfare hard to endure. It is more difficult to fight a foe that one cannot see than it is in open attack, when one, seeing the enemy, can prepare himself for the onslaught.

It is this same fact that makes our spiritual conflicts more difficult, for we must wrestle against the powers of darkness, against the unseen hosts of

wickedness, even in heavenly places. Within and without we are assailed by enemies that we cannot see, nor can we always define them. The powers of darkness attack from without, and the imps of doubt from within.

Therefore the writer here urges complete preparation, and the climax of this preparation is not armour at all but prayer: "with all prayer and supplication." It is this fact that needs emphasis to-day, namely that the final element of victory in this unseen struggle of the heart is prayer. While we fight unseen foes, we can always choose the field of battle, that is, we can fight within the realm of prayer. It is prayer, then, that is the final equipment for victory on the battle-field of the heart. It will help us to see the truth of this statement by following the line of thought which Paul here sets before us.

I. The Christian life is a conflict.

He who would be righteous has a fight on his hands. In seeking goodness he meets enemies who must be beaten. Enemies assail from without, even the powers of darkness. Enemies offer battle from within, even the lusts of the flesh. No one who is in earnest about goodness ever describes his experiences in terms other than those of a fight. Paul is a typical example. He writes, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit," and again, "I buffet my body."

Likewise the most eminent Christians always describe their experiences in terms of conflict.

Only a little while ago an old friend, whose piety has been to me at once a marvel and an inspiration, in speaking of his experiences, said, "It has been a long, hard fight." There are sincerely pious people who say that the Christian life involves no struggle at all, that it is only surrender and that God does it all; but still there is a fight to make the surrender. In the last analysis it is, of course, the power of God's might; but notwithstanding there is a struggle which we must make to bring ourselves to the point of surrender. Therefore the whole figure used to describe the experiences of a Christian in efforts after righteousness is a figure drawn from warfare.

II. The Christian life is a hidden conflict.

No eye sees the decisive part of the engagement. The hardest battles of life are the hidden battles of the heart. The decisive battles of the world are won in private by some general who makes the plan, or by some group of men who outline it. It is with them that the battle is won before it is fought out on the bloody field.

One of the greatest lawyers of the world said that cases are won in chambers and not in court. The great physicians tell us that their most signal victories are won in secret, not in the presence of the patient and his friends. In the privacy of their own offices these men of the healing art think and study and plan. For a year I lived in the home of a great surgeon in South Carolina. I have known him to study over a case until far into the night,

and at the breakfast table he would say, "I think that I can cure that case now." What I am trying to emphasize is that all battles worth winning are won in secret. All night Napoleon would ponder the situation before he would complete his plans and issue his orders. In the winter at Valley Forge Washington planned the spring campaign which resulted in the surrender of the British at Yorktown.

So the decisive battles of our lives are hidden, and the outward conflicts are but the echo and reverberation of the more real and inward warfare. Behind the public ministry of the Master through which He moved with such calmness and courage lay the battles in the wilderness, where He fought out in secret the principles which controlled His life. Behind His patience in Pilate's court and His faithfulness on Calvary lay the battle of Gethsemane. There the whole problem was dealt with, the whole issue settled in secret fellowship with the Father. The calmness and the victorious attitude of Paul, as he stood before governors and kings, as also in the perils of wreck by sea, can be accounted for by his secret experiences in the desert of Arabia and in nights of prayer to God.

III. The final and decisive element of victory in this conflict is prayer.

In this program of preparation which Paul sets before the Christian it is to be noted that prayer is put last, and this not because it is the least important, but because it is the most important. Paul

would have us learn that God will not do for us what we can do for ourselves. We are to put on first the helmet and the breastplate and to take the sword in hand. Our equipment we are to complete with prayer and supplication. Here is a great truth which some overlook. Some seem to believe that no preparation is necessary, that all is trust and prayer. It would help us all if we were as sane and honest as Paul was. Though his head was in the seventh heaven, his feet were on the ground. He did not become a fanatic because of his spiritual experiences.

This is the right order of things even in this great world war. I believe that the greatest element of victory in the war will be the prayers of God's people. But these prayers are not to come before but after all possible preparation of men and munitions. The final element, therefore, as Paul teaches, is the element of prayer.

Moreover, prayer is the decisive element in every struggle. Victory in every conflict, and over every manner of foe, lies here. The best evidence of this is to be found in the example of the great prayers of the world. The great struggle for right desire over all has been fought and won by prayer. Let a man try as he will to set his heart on righteousness, he will find that the course of that desire does not run smoothly. It is hindered and halted. The most serious trouble, the trouble which goes deepest, in our characters and lives, is that which has its source in our wayward appetites.

Prayer is the battle-field where war against wrong desire is fought out and won. In his autobiography "Chinese" Gordon uses these words, "I can say, for my part, that backbiting and envy and so on often led me astray, but by dint of perseverance and prayer God has given me the mastery to a great degree." Even more vivid are other words used to describe his victory: "I had a terrible struggle this morning with Agag, but I finally succeeded in hewing him to pieces before the Lord." Of course we can understand his words. Some evil desire was in him, some selfish ambition. These he dragged up before the face of the Lord and hewed them to pieces.

This same truth finds expression in the thirty-eighth Psalm: "Lord, all my desire is before thee." It is by prayer that men win the victory over the effect of evil desires, and by prayer these desires themselves are conquered. This ought to be the aim of our prayer. The injunction nowhere finds better expression than in the words of Coleridge:

"Whatever is good to wish, ask that of Heaven,
Though it be what thou canst not hope to see;
Pray to be perfect; though the material leaven,
Forbid the spirit so on earth to be.
But if for any wish thou darest not to pray,
Then pray to God to cast that wish away."

The struggle between the desire for the praise of the world on the one hand and the approval of God

on the other is often fought out in this hidden battle of prayer. It is a distinguishing quality of great souls that they are able to discount the praise of men and to set their hearts singly upon the praise of God. It is not an easy thing to say, as Peter did when facing persecution and death, "We ought to obey God rather than men." It is a great thing to be ruled less by the public opinion of the world than by the public opinion of the universe, for this latter is the will of God.

Such living as this costs a fight. God is not the only one whom we may try to please. Evil assumes its most seductive form when it appeals to the desire to please men. This conflict between the desire to please God and to please the generation in the midst of which He lived was the central struggle of the Master's life and He fought it out in prayer. As we look across the centuries at His life we see that the one dominant motive of that life was to please the Father; but that was not accomplished without a struggle. To please God meant to displease His family and the leaders of His nation. It meant desertion on the part of those who had been His friends and the bitter calumny of His enemies. It meant that He would be looked upon as a traitor by His country and as a heretic by the Church.

This great battle of the Master was repeatedly fought out in prayer. It is the meaning of Gethsemane. Prayer is a fight for the power to see and the courage to do the will of God. No

man's life is wholly free from this struggle if he makes any effort at all toward worthy character and life, and the best assurance of success lies in daily prayer. There day by day the issue is settled that we shall not live as pleasing man, but as pleasing God who proveth our hearts.

In prayer the great men of the world have gained the victory. By prayer men have regained their faith, and, winning back right desires, have gone forth to live as pleasing God. Whitefield, the great revivalist, used to lie all day prostrate in prayer. Luther used to say, "I am so busy now that if I do not spend two or three hours a day in prayer, I cannot get through the day." Whether we pray a long time or a short time depends upon temperament. We may pray the most when we say the least, and we may pray the least when we say the most. The important thing is that the supreme struggles of life, those of vital importance, are won by prayer. As Fosdick has said in his fine little work on prayer, "Some feel about prayer as men feel who, not understanding what astronomy has done for life, go into an observatory and see the astronomer studying the stars." To the man of every-day affairs this work of the star-gazer seems a foolish waste; but the fact is that the star-gazer sets the clock by which we do our tasks. He makes the almanac by which we measure our day. He frames the calendar by which we count our year. We never caught a train, nor figured time, nor set ourselves to any common duty that

we did not put ourselves under obligation to him who studies the stars.

So prayer is an observatory. It is there we get our reckoning for life. The old Greeks before going into battle consulted the oracle. Prayer is our oracle. It is, to renew the figure of a moment ago, our observatory from which we get a right view of God and right view too of life. And when we have these we have power for the overthrow of every enemy that may assail. If we take the armament described in these words of Paul, not forgetting the greatest of them all, prayer to God, we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one and march through life triumphantly to receive at last the victor's crown.

XII

THE INCREASING CHRIST

He must increase, but I must decrease.—JOHN 3: 30.

THERE is no finer instance of magnanimity than that recorded here. John the Baptist saw the crowds which had followed him dwindling and in great numbers going to Jesus. When his waning popularity was spoken of, he answered in these words of our text, "He must increase, but I must decrease." It is never an easy thing to give way to another, to see one's popularity pass and another take the place in which one was formerly useful and happy. But this the Baptist not only accepted cheerfully; he was even able to rejoice in the increasing popularity of Jesus and was content to be only "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" that he might make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

As there has been no finer display of magnanimity than that made by John, so also there has never been a finer tribute than that paid by Jesus: "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." This tribute takes on a new value when we remember that it came from the lips of our Lord.

But we are not so much concerned in our study to-day with the great-heartedness of John as we are with the fact of the increasing Christ. Of this there is, of course, an application to the mission and the ministry of Christ in the world. He has been and is and will continue through all time to be an increasing Christ. We can rejoice in our faith that even in these awful days of war His power is on the increase. Only a few days ago I was reading the testimony given by a number of British soldiers, who, though differing greatly as to denominations, agreed absolutely that never in their lives was there a time when Christianity meant so much to them as it means in these days. It is a singular thing that, with criticism so rampant, in a time when men are finding fault with the Church and questioning the creeds of the Church, some even saying that the influence of the Church is rapidly waning, there is no voice lifted against Christ Himself. The British chaplain, Dr. Tip-lady, the author of that splendid little book, "The Cross at the Front," speaks most vividly of the increasing power and influence of Christ and His cross in the lives of the soldiers, and freely predicts that there will be a great revival of religion at the close of the war and possibly before. There need be no fear in our hearts as to the future of the religion of Christ. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law"—words of an ancient prophet finding their fulfillment in our own

day. "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."

But we must concern ourselves with still a different application of the statement of our text, and that is a personal one. It is an increasing Christ in our own hearts that we are to think of. When one becomes a Christian the old nature still remains in part. There is, however, the new nature resulting from Christ in us, the Christ who is the hope of glory. The man who is not a Christian is only carnal, fleshly. The two natures in the Christian exist side by side, and it is the work of the Christian to see that the carnal grows less and less and the spiritual more and more. In the kingdom of Israel there existed two royal families, the house of David and the house of Saul. The house of David grew stronger and stronger until it was absolute. The house of Saul became weaker and weaker until at length it passed away. The life of the Christian may be likened unto that of the early Christian Church. Within the early Church there existed side by side many things of the old dispensation and the spirit of grace and freedom in Christ of the new dispensation. The old things after a little passed altogether out of sight and the new things of the religion of Christ took their place. To this there is a resemblance in the history of every Christian life. The old life must decrease while the life in Christ must increase. "If

any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." In making this personal application we are, therefore, to think of these two things:

1. The decreasing self. It has just been said that it is the business of the Christian to see to it that the old nature which is carnal decreases until it is no longer dominant in our lives, until sin has little or no power over us, until sin ceases to reign in our mortal bodies, until Christ is all and in all, until the life which we live in the flesh we live by the faith of the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

The task, then, for the Christian is that of striving for the decrease of self, and both the biblical and scientific method for the elimination of self is to ignore it until it is atrophied. Paul's words are, "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord," and again, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." The principle is that long ago expressed by Horace Bushnell, "the capacity for religion is extirpated by disuse." The rule works as to other things. What we do not use we lose. The fish in Mammoth Cave once had eyes like other fish, but dwelling in darkness, their eyes never used, they lost the power of sight. The appendix is thought once to have had a definite function, but in some way not known it has lost its use and is now only a menace to health and life. About the only use that it seems to have now is to

furnish a living to surgeons and to create in America a class of aristocrats, the appendixless class.

By means of a very simple experiment you may see the working of this principle. Bind up your arm and for a month carry it in a sling. At the end of the month attempt to use your arm, and you will find that it has lost much of its power. There is a parallel in the spiritual life. If we refuse to be governed by self and sin, if through faith in God we reckon ourselves dead unto sin, sin actually tends to die. Therefore the Bible writer was speaking with scientific accuracy when he said, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof."

I recall that, when living in another city, I was greatly disturbed by the frequent ringing of the bells of a Catholic church which stood almost directly across the street from my home. As it did not suit me to move and as the church would not move I resolved that I would not hear the ringing of those disturbing bells. Soon the time came when, however loud was their ringing, I did not hear them. In fact, when one day my thought was directed to the matter, I could not recall when I had last heard the bells. Some time ago a friend told me that when he first came to the city to live, he was constantly being attracted to auction sales, and that invariably he came away with a gold brick. He saw the folly of what he was doing and soon was able to overcome it. These are but homely

illustrations of a great truth. The habitual denying of the self-life, the habit of turning a deaf ear to the appeals of sin, lessens wonderfully the strength of such appeals. Let me say this to those who are young, especially to those who are young in Christian experience: there is such a thing as a good habit as well as a bad habit. To ignore the appeal of evil, to close the ears to its siren voice to-day, will make it easier to-morrow. The voice of the old nature is not gone. You will hear it call you away from the church to "eat, drink, and be merry"; but, by God's grace, cultivate the habit of resisting it and the enticing voice will grow faint and still more faint.

This is one of the hopeful features of our religion. Every temptation resisted makes one stronger to resist the next. We do indeed, as the poet sings, rise upon "the stepping stones of our dead selves to higher things." No matter how bitter the fight to-day, to-morrow's sun will find you farther up the hill. You may never be able entirely to subdue the old life, though some seem to have achieved even this. Generally, however, it is true that a remnant of the old evil remains to be as a thorn in our flesh that we may be humble. But it is possible to approach unto that place where self has so decreased that the normal experience is that of victory, and even if there should be occasional defeat, we may thank God that the experience of defeat is exceptional. Therefore the program of the Christian life, on its negative side, is

the decreasing of self until we can say with the poet, "None of self and all of thee."

2. The increasing Christ. If we are to live the Christian life in any worthy way, we must give attention to the positive aspect of it. Christ must increase in our lives. Religion is Christ in us, and real religion means the increasing Christ. It is worth the preacher's while to plead for this. It is worth while for every one to think of the ways in which the Christ should increase in our lives.

(a) He should have an increasing place in our thoughts. Our thoughts are the source of our life. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." If we will allow the Christ to increase in our thoughts, we shall find Him increasing in all other things of life. Let us begin each day with a definite thought as to the will of Christ for us that day. And in all matters where we are compelled to choose, let us think what choice Christ would have us make. Anything that will help us to give Christ an increasing place in our thoughts we should cultivate. This it is that gives value to attendance upon the services of the church, not the morning service only but all its services. By the law of association the very entering into the church brings Christ to mind. Even a better thing than going to church is communing with Christ in prayer. Let the beginning of each new day and its close find us upon our knees in prayer and meditation. The same law operates here as operates elsewhere: "We all, with

unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3: 18, R. V.). A letter from an absent loved one brings that loved one more vividly before us. Even the likeness of a loved one carried about with us serves to make that dear one more real. So everything that brings Christ more closely to us and tends to give Him an increasing place in our lives should be cultivated.

(b) Christ should have an increasing place in our hearts. I am using the word "heart" in the Bible sense, as indicating the very center of life, the affection, reason, and will. To have Him increase there means an increasing place in our affections. It is what Jesus had in mind when He said to Peter, "Lovest thou me?" It is what John, too, had in mind when he wrote, "We love him because he first loved us." The constant and intelligent effort to appreciate Christ's love for us compels us to give Him a larger place in our hearts. It seems to me that this is one of the elements of value in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It unveils before us the wondrous devotion and sacrifice of Jesus and gives Him an increasing place in our affections.

But by "heart" we are to understand also the will. When the Bible says, "Son, give me thine heart," it means "Give me thy will." In the Christian life there is an increasing yielding of the will to Christ. This matter of yielding to Christ never

stops. Each new day brings some new circumstance in which it becomes necessary for us to yield the will to Christ. Henry Drummond is the author of a little study which he entitles, "The Meaning of Life." His teaching is that the supreme end of life is not to do good or to be good, not even to win souls to Christ, but that we do the will of Christ in all things, and by illustration goes on to show that the life which is being constantly yielded to Christ is the only ideal life. That sort of life has its high example in Him of whom it is written, "I come to do thy will." It furnishes high companionship: "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." It has a perfect program of education: "Teach me to do thy will." It is a life of the finest pleasure, the truest joy: "I delight to do thy will, O Lord." The essential thing, then, in the successful Christian life is to give Christ an increasing place in our hearts, to be willing in all things to do His will. This complete yielding of the life to Christ finds expression in one of the familiar hymns:

"It may not be on the mountain's height,
Or over the stormy sea;
It may not be at the battle's front
My Lord will have need of me:
But if by a still, small voice He calls
To paths that I do not know,
I'll answer, 'Dear Lord, with my hand in Thine
I'll go where you want me to go.'"

(c) Christ must increase in our service. This is the final appeal I would make to-day. We have been content to give Christ all too little of our time and our means. We have too often been playing at Christian service. There never was a time in which there is a more urgent call to Christian service. It is not Christianity that is on trial so much as it is we ourselves. The task that Christianity has to perform is by far the hardest task since Christ came. Not only do we have a pagan and heathen world to reclaim, but we have somehow to counteract the demoralizing influence of the war by an aggressive Christianity. Moreover, we have as ours the task of giving Christ to the millions of young men now on the fields of battle before they become the victims of the Moloch of war. The only answer, not only to the criticism of the religion of Christ, but as well to the increasing need of the world, is the giving of ourselves in larger measure to the service of Christ. In a recent address, President Wilson urged that the Church be kept at concert pitch, and there be no letting down or falling back. The best defense of Christianity is an aggressive program. Last autumn Coach Warner, of the University of Pittsburgh, said, in reply to criticism of his tactics, that the best defense for a football team is a strong offense. The same is true as to Christianity and its work in the world. By displaying the increasing power of Christ in our lives and in the lives of others we change the question mark which some

men are putting after the Church into an exclamation point, "Behold what hath God wrought!"

There never was a time, may I say in closing, when there was so great a need for an increasing service in the cause of Christ, and this in our own community and even in our own church. The rapid growth of this part of our city, the fact that so many of our young men have been called to the colours, the increasing need of strength and comfort and optimism which only Christianity can furnish, make it imperative that we give to Christ this year the largest possible service.

I am pleading, therefore, to-day for an increasing Christ. Let self decrease to the vanishing point. The man or woman trying to live for self in these great days is like one born out of due time. We must simply forget self, not only in the interests of the republic, but in the interests of the Christ. Let Christ increase in our lives to the point of complete dominance and let us keep on praying and trusting and yielding until there shall be none of self but all of Him.

XIII

GOD AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Thou art the man.—2 SAMUEL, 12: 7.

THE story of David's great sin is so familiar that it does not need recounting. There are, however, two or three lessons to be learned from it, and these I would mention. David was at home living in luxury when he ought to have been on the field of battle. Large success and great wealth had taken the manly spirit out of him and he had become too much the mere seeker after pleasure. The consequences show us how our pleasant vices make whips to scourge us. We find in it, too, an illustration of the commonplace yet vital truth, that one sin leads to another. David committed murder in the vain hope of concealing his sin of adultery.

But this royal sinner did not go long unrebuked. God sent the prophet Nathan to tell David of his sin. It was no easy task for Nathan. He and David were very close friends. The prophet had received much help at the hands of the king. David's position as king made the task of Nathan the more difficult, but the prophet goes courageously to his duty. After the oriental fashion, he puts

his rebuke in the form of a parable. The parable takes the king on the most susceptible side of his nature. David was a man of kind and generous impulses, and the story was such as to stir these in him: A friend comes to visit a man of wealth and the latter for the entertainment of his guest decides to kill a lamb; but he refuses to take from his own flocks and takes from a poor neighbour the "one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter." At the recital of such cruelty David's soul flames and he cries out in his wrath, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Then Nathan makes the application, bringing the truth home to David's conscience. His accusing words are those of our text, "Thou art the man." Then David realized it all. He sees his sin as he had not seen it before. The great man bows in sorrow for his sin and in real agony of soul cries out, "I have sinned against the Lord."

The story serves to illustrate certain important truths.

I. How strangely blind we are to our own faults.

A man's sins are seldom seen in their true character. When the sin is apart from himself it is

seen in its true colours, but when the sin is his own his eyes are blind to its real nature. We have two sets of names for vices. One set rather excuses them. Another set puts them in their real ugliness. The former we use in speaking of our own sins. We call these weaknesses and follies. But when we speak of the sins of others, we are very free in painting them in all their horrid colours. So the fact is that we condemn our own vices when we see them in others, but we do not see them as vices in ourselves. David did not for a moment suspect that when he was condemning the imaginary man for his cruelty, he was condemning himself. The man of the parable had stolen and killed the one ewe lamb of his poor neighbour. David had robbed a wife of her virtue and had sent a gallant soldier to his death. In condemning the lesser sin of another he spoke the severer condemnation of himself. We still need to make the prayer of Robert Burns:

“ Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursel's as others see us !
It wad frae monie a blunder free us
And foolish notion.”

And there is even a better prayer than this. It is that we may see ourselves, not as others see us, but as God sees us. And to see ourselves as God sees us is to see ourselves as we are. But how hard that is. To our faults we seem to be as strangely blind as David was to his.

Just why this is so it would be hard to say. Two or three reasons may be given in explanation.

For one thing, a strong desire for anything on which we have set our hearts always tends to confuse the distinctions which ought to be made between right and wrong. Our desires once excited, we go straight toward their object and scarcely stop to consider whether our actions be right or wrong.

Then, too, when habit has once made us familiar with evil our sense of it as evil is diminished. At first, doubtless, David realized his sin, but shortly after he was called away to the field of battle, and for a year his mind was occupied with the bitter struggle against the children of Ammon. Through this whole year he was living in sin, but the first clear conviction of it had lessened and the very habit had diminished the sense of evil. It might be illustrated in this way: A man that is living in a poorly ventilated room does not notice the poisoned atmosphere. If you go into it from the outside air, at first you are almost stifled, but breathe easier as you become accustomed to it. So men live in evil and become blind to the evil of their lives. Dr. Watkinson has a great sermon which he entitles, "The Blind Spot." In it he shows that nearly every one of us has some defect, in other words a blind spot. Living in sin, one becomes blind to the hideousness of that particular sin.

Then it is also true that many purposely and continually avoid all questions as to the moral character of their conduct. We seldom sit down to

reason whether what we have been doing is right or wrong, and the reason is that deep down in our natures we know what the answer would be. David does not seem to have allowed himself to give much thought to what he had done. In fact he seems purposely to have occupied himself with the affairs of his army so as not to have time for thought concerning his sin, and it would appear that in some measure he succeeded.

Then, again, we are blind to our own faults because we refuse to individualize them. In a general sort of a way we are all ready to say that we have sinned. We lose ourselves in the crowd, join in the one acknowledgment, and confess that all have sinned. But for the words "we" and "all" we need to substitute the personal pronoun "I," and say, each of us, "I have sinned against the Lord," as David did. For every one of us must give an account of himself to God. The truth calls, therefore, for self-examination. It means that we are to look deep into our own hearts, assured that if we do, we will hear the voice of conscience speaking in the words of the prophet, "Thou art the man."

II. The words of our text set before us the real purpose of God's methods.

It required a message and a messenger from God to break through David's heart and to thrust the cold steel into his soul. "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword." David did not come to a convic-

tion of sin until he heard God's message from one of God's own messengers.

This very fact that we are so strangely blind to our own sins argues two things.

It is, for one thing, an argument showing the necessity for a divine revelation. We need another than self to lay down the law of conduct. Conscience is far from being a wholly reliable guide. Conscience is neither an impartial nor an all-knowing judge. The fact that one is not conscious of evil is not by any means proof positive of innocence. My conscience tells me that I must not do wrong, that I must do right, but when I ask as to what is right or wrong I get no answer from conscience. A man may bribe his conscience, he may throttle it, he may even sneer at it. So the worst men, the men who ought to suffer most from the torturings of conscience, are often freest from these. Therefore it is plain that we cannot rely upon the judgment of conscience. Paul thought, when he persecuted the Church, that he was doing God service. Your conscience and another man's, though they may agree in the main, are not the same. Conscience is like our weights and measures. We need occasionally to take these to a perfect standard that they may be corrected and certified. We need, therefore, a perfect standard of revelation. Our need of such a standard is in itself an argument that a loving God will give us what we need, and that is what He has done. In His book and in the life and character of Jesus

Christ He has given a revelation of Himself, and by that revelation one may set his conscience even as by a perfect chronometer one sets his watch.

Having thus before us the revelation which God has given, we see what its purpose is. It is to touch the conscience and to enlighten it, and at the same time to kindle a sense of sin. And this likewise is the great program of God's messengers. The only true sermon is one which makes appeal to conscience, and the very message which is most unpleasant may be in the most real sense a message from God. A sermon which pleases the intellect and soothes the conscience may be popular, but it will probably accomplish little in the lives of men. On the contrary, a sermon which arouses opposition, because it has pierced the conscience, may be doing the greatest amount of good. The Church and the Christian people and the preachers who go along doing their work and offering a testimony without interfering with the evils of the world, may be very much liked by the world. When, on the contrary, they are opposing the world and exposing the sin of the world and its institutions, they may be hated, but they are showing themselves to be true prophets of God. In reality the message which rebukes sin is the truest kindness. When Nathan stood before the king that day and spoke the words that pierced and burned, he was doing a truer and a nobler thing, a thing more worthy of his God and his prophetic office, than if he had attempted to ease David and with

soft words relieve his conscience. The surgeon may be doing a more kindly thing than the homeopath. His gleaming instruments may be a kinder, because surer, remedy than a bromide. It is plain from every consideration that the one great loving purpose of divine revelation is to kindle a sense of sin. That is why Nathan came to David. He told him of his sin that he might escape its penalty, be delivered from its power, and be made clean of its pollution.

III. God condemns us individually that He may save us individually.

The prophet's message accomplished the prophet's purpose. David was convicted of sin and, in his agony of soul, cried out, "I have sinned against the Lord." The prophet speaks tender and healing words: "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die."

What we need to learn from the story is that this same individualizing and isolating process is needed still. God desires to save the world, but He can save the world only as He saves men one by one. There is no wholesale entering into the Kingdom of God. There must be personal faith. There must be personal repentance and personal acceptance. Salvation is the meeting of the lonely soul with God alone. God had to deal with David as an individual. He had to forgive him as an individual. It is not enough for us to say, "We have sinned." It is not enough that we cry, "Lord, have mercy upon us." We must come to

closer grips with God, even as did Jacob that night when he wrestled and cried out, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." We need to cry, "O Lord, thou who didst love *me* and give thyself for *me*, have mercy upon *me*." The difference between really possessing forgiveness and not possessing it is in the difference between saying "us" and saying "me." The accusation is still that of this old prophet,—“Thou art the man,” and penitence must be just as personal with us as it was with David, for salvation is personal now as it was then. Christ gives us the blank check in His word, "Whosoever believeth on him shall not perish." Each must write his or her own name into it.

In all this concerning the individual I am not losing sight of the social ministry of the Church. I believe that the Church can bring help to men in crowds, that religion can better the outer condition of the world by states and nations, and that this it ought by all means to do; but the Church cannot save men by crowds. We can be saved only as individuals. Hence the value of this old story, for here the process is made plain. We are strangely blind to our own sins until they are shown to us by God's message and through His messenger. By the law is the knowledge of sin. Moreover, this is the supreme purpose of God's message. It is to enlighten conscience and to reveal sin, and this it must do for each of us if it is to do its perfect work. The preacher may speak to crowds, but God's Spirit must take the word to

each individual and bring it to conscience and heart in these words of our text, "Thou art the man." The very message that shows us the way to faith, the knife that opens up the wound to save the patient, brings life to the soul in sin. Nathan went to David to condemn him, and this he did in love that he might save him. God sent His prophet to accuse the king that He might forgive him, and, when David made confession, his forgiveness was immediate, free, and full. The same God who said, "Thou art the man," said also, "I have put away the iniquity of thy sin." This is the course each of us must follow if we would find cleansing and peace and life.

XIV

THE UNKNOWN FUTURE

It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.—Acts 1:7.

THE conversations of our Lord with His disciples during the forty days intervening between His resurrection and ascension furnish an attractive field for the play of the imagination. We have recorded only a few of these, and the probabilities are that He had many conversations with His disciples of which we are told nothing. We are, however, given here and there an example of the theme of these conversations. It is said that He taught and reasoned with them concerning the Kingdom of God, and the sure and certain way in which they went forward in the work of spreading the Gospel under the direction of the Holy Spirit is an indication that they had received careful directions as to the progress of the kingdom.

One of these conversations is recorded here in the first few verses of the opening chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. It has to do especially with His second advent, for the disciples still had mistaken notions as to the advent and the nature of

the kingdom which Christ would establish. The question which they asked, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" was a perfectly natural one, for they were slow to relinquish the idea that His kingdom would be a sort of pan-Israelitish kingdom somewhat similar to the pan-Germanic kingdom of which we are hearing so much just now.

Our Lord's answer to that question is a very practical one. He admonishes them that they are not to lament the past or dream of the future. That future is in the power of God. The time of Christ's return and the final establishment of His kingdom are known only to God. The thing for them to do is to get to work and witness for Him even to the ends of the earth.

The immediate application, then, is to their ignorance as to the time of Christ's return. It admits, however, of a very much wider application, and it seems to me a very appropriate subject for our thought as we stand upon the threshold of a new year. Especially is it appropriate when we think of the uncertainty of the times, and the feeling that all these wars and rumours of wars are the prelude to what is in reality the end of the age, indicating the early return of Christ to the world that He may establish forever His perfect kingdom.

Along these lines I ask you to think with me this morning,—the wisdom which keeps us ignorant of the future, the safe hands which hold that

future, and the all-sufficient power for the present and the future.

I. The wisdom of keeping us ignorant of the future.

“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.” How little we know of the future and how well it is that we know so little.

We are quite sure that we shall all pass away. We are sure that a mingled web of joy and sorrow, light shot through with dark, will be unrolled before us, but as to anything beyond that we know nothing. We feel certain that a great majority of us will be living at the end of this year, but who will not be among the living we cannot know. A great many of us, especially those in the monotonous stretch of middle life, will go on much as we have been going on through the recent years, with our ordinary duties and joys and sorrows; but to some of us in all probability this year will bring some great change, which may brighten or darken all our remaining days. The future fronts us like some great statue hidden in mist and shadows.

But that of which I would remind you is this, how merciful and wise that this is so. How merciful, for example, that we do not know when the Christ will come. That is what these men of the early day wished to know. How wise to keep it from them. But look at it in another way. Suppose that Christ had fixed a date for His return. It must have been near or far off. In either case He

would have defeated the very purpose of the kingdom of heaven on earth, the object of that kingdom being to teach men how to live the life of God in this present world. Uncertainty as to the end is the healthiest state of mind in which the followers of Christ can be. Christ holds out the prospect of His return for a twofold purpose. It is, for one thing, that He may comfort His people under the daily troubles of life. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." But there was another and equally important thing to be accomplished by this uncertainty. It stirred men to a perpetual watchfulness and to right and faithful care and devotion lest when their Lord came He find them sleeping. We are all aware that, taking the New Testament as a whole, there are two contrasted lines of prophecy as to Christ's second coming. One seems to indicate its nearness, the other that it is far off. Both create an uncertainty that produces a combination of comfort and an incentive to faithfulness and devotion to the end. Suppose that He had responded to the query and set the date of His coming at a thousand years from that time. It would have robbed it of all its practical power over men because of its remoteness. Suppose that He had fixed it for the end of that century. It would have paralyzed all effort, religious, commercial, and other. All work would have been looked upon as an impertinence. This was its effect upon the Thessalonians.

They misapprehended Paul's words and believed that the coming of Christ was imminent. In consequence they ceased work and became busybodies. The experience there among the Thessalonians has often been repeated through the centuries. The year 1000 A. D. was supposed to mark the end of the age. Men abandoned their work and left their families to starve. The result was widespread misery, famine and disease. Again in 1830 we find a repetition of this experience in England. Experience teaches us that no men have been more unpractical and profitless Christians than those who attempt to figure out the exact date as to the reappearance of the Son of Man.

Now the same evil effect that would have resulted had our Lord fixed the exact date of His return would follow in individual lives if we knew just when we should be called before God to give an account of the deeds done in the body. If a man knew that he had fifty years to live, the tendency would be to carelessness, to say as did the man in the parable, "My Lord delayeth his coming." He would feel that he had plenty of time to prepare for the end of life and the judgment. In case the life was full of trouble, and the burdened one felt that he must wait fifty years for deliverance, he would be borne down with discouragement. If we knew the future, as the date drew near, we would feel that effort was not worth while. But since, in the loving wisdom of God we do not know, we can go about our work in life with

at least a hope of opportunity and a belief that we shall not be called away till our work is done, and at the same time inspired with faithfulness by the very fact that we know not when the Son of Man cometh.

The wise course of conduct, then, is this: not a confident reckoning on to-morrow, nor that self-confidence that takes it for granted that to-morrow shall be as this day. The conceit that things are to go on as they have been indefinitely fools men into a dream of permanence that has no basis in fact. And the fearful apprehension of evil is not any better. How many people spoil the present joy with the skeleton of to-morrow's sorrow. Like they are to the little girl who spoiled all her visit with the thought of having to separate the next day. There are certain wise precautions which we must take, of which I shall speak presently in another connection.

II. The safe hands which hold the future. "Which the Father hath put in his own power."

The future is not guided by an impersonal fate. It is not a wild whirlwind of chance. It is not guided even by a theistic providence. It is not to be reckoned by the laws of averages, as the insurance companies reckon the future. It is in the hands of a Father, and that makes us feel pretty safe in regard to the future, provided, of course, that we are in right relations with the Father and trust Him and accept His love in Christ. One has not much to fear. The child faces the future with-

out anxiety, because if he does not know, the father knows and the father will guide and protect him. It is so with us if we are the sons of God, and are trustful of Him as a Father. Then there are two things at least of which we may be sure:

1. That whatever comes it will be the loving discipline of a Father, who shapes it all and keeps it in His own hands. As Browning puts it, "He guides me and the bird." That very name of Father pledges him to a wide and loving and disciplinary dealing, and should move us to a happy trust. It is a bit hard to believe this to-day when we think of the misery that is in the world. It seems as though the world were left to blind chance. It is hard to reconcile the fact of the future being in the hands of the Father with the cruel things which are happening in the world. But there is this to be said, that God sustains other relations to the world in general. He is the moral governor of the universe, and in so far as this moral government affects His children we may be sure that it will be ordered in loving discipline for their good.

2. Since God is our Father and we are His sons we are assured that we shall grow more and more into His likeness. "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

III. Sufficient strength and patience for the unknown to-morrow.

“Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” The two things about the future which Jesus told His disciples should concern them were strength and service.

1. God will take care of the strength. “The Holy Spirit shall come upon you.” This same power is promised to us all through the grace of Christ. All that there is for us to do is to accept it. The Holy Spirit is the true interpreter of providence. He calms our nature and gives us inward peace and enlightens our understanding that we may grasp the meaning of all our experiences. He is the great comforter and power for His people and through Him the grace of God will be made sufficient. Hence if we are His, we may be quite sure that nothing will come to us in our earthly future which He Himself will not accompany to interpret it to us in some measure and make it a blessing.

2. The great thing we should look to in the future is our work. The great remedy for a morbid anticipation of the future lies in regarding life as an opportunity for service. But attend to your work and be faithful to your duty. That clears away cobwebs from the brain, as when, in the country, one wakes from troubled dreams to hear the sweep of the scythe in the field of grain, the songs of the labourers as they go to their work,

the lowing of the cattle, the sound of the hammer and the creaking of the blacksmith's bellows, or, if in the city, the whistle of the engine and the voice of the street car and the clatter of the hoofs of the horses upon the asphalt. So work will waken us from the troubled dreams and keep us busy and free from vain speculations.

Then the great work we have to do in the future is to be witnesses for Christ. This is the meaning of all life, in both joy and sorrow. For the ancient challenge, "Come and see how a Christian can suffer," has lost none of its power. The quiet and submissive way in which a Christian bears suffering is one of the strongest proofs of the reality of Christianity in his life. And in this work of witnessing for Christ we are immortal till our work is done. Jesus said to His disciples that He would not return until the Gospel had been preached to the uttermost parts of the earth. So He will not call you away until you have fulfilled your mission of witnessing for Him. And we may look upon these words of our text as a promise of preservation till our work is done.

Then, my friend, how do you stand with God, facing as you do that unknown to-morrow? How can you face it without going mad unless you know God and trust Him through Christ as your Father? If you do so trust Him, you need have no fear. To-morrow lies all dim and strange before you, but His gentle hand is working in the darkness and He will shape all things right. He will fit you to bear

whatever comes and make all things work together for good. He will not let you fall.

If God is not your Father through Christ, how dreary is the future which you face. It is like putting out upon a stormy sea from which wild shapes may come up and devour you and upon which you are sailing without chart or compass or pilot. Love and friendship will pass, strength will fail, as will also honour. Life will ebb away and of all that once stretched before you nothing will be left but one tiny strip of sand, fast sinking away with the tide beneath your feet and before you a wild and unlighted ocean.

Accept God's fatherly love through confessing and embracing Christ. Commit your life into the hand of the Father who holds the future, and then you can sing every fear to sleep with the lullaby of a sweet and blessed trust.

“ For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.”

XV

SHALL WE KNOW EACH OTHER IN HEAVEN?

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

—I THESSALONIANS 4: 17.

THE Church to-day is giving much thought to the fact of immortality, its certainty as made manifest by the resurrection of Jesus. But it seems to me that there is another question of equal importance: Shall the resurrection, granting that there is a resurrection, usher us into an existence that is desirable? Is immortality desirable? I recall when a boy hearing it said that heaven is an eternal Sabbath. If it is—and I would say it reverently—then there is not much to choose between heaven and the other place. One of the things that will make heaven desirable is the maintenance of our identity and individuality. If we are to lose these and immortality is only the endurance of corporate life, then there is not much to be gained by it. This, you know, was George Eliot's belief. Another thing that will make it desirable is that we shall know each other in heaven. If we shall not, then there will be nothing so in-

conceivably lonely as the souls that shall pass each other on the golden streets, like ships that pass in the night, with, perhaps, only a salute, but with no knowledge of the passer-by.

It seems to me that next to the fact of seeing Christ face to face and living in perfect fellowship with Him and becoming like Him whom we shall see face to face, dwelling in the consciousness of His infinite love, there is nothing so essential to a happy existence as the knowledge of and fellowship with our redeemed friends. We are dependent upon them in this world for our happiness and joy, and I feel that we shall be none the less dependent upon them in heaven. A man was once asked if he thought that he should know his twin sister in heaven. He replied that he would be so absorbed in the "bright and morning star" that he might sit by her for ages and not notice her, in which statement I think that there is a vast amount of pious ignorance. We do not love Jesus Christ less because of our pious friends here, rather more, I should say, and shall not the presence and communion with our fellows there lead us also to love Christ the more there? I have a favourite sister in heaven and when I get there the first thing I expect to do is to pay my Lord the homage of a heart overflowing with gratitude, and the next thing I expect to do is to look up my sister and renew the sweet companionship of earth that was broken a few years ago. Is this hope an intelligent hope? Do we have any proofs that substantiate the an-

swer that we shall know each other in heaven? It seems to me that we have three witnesses,—the witness of human instinct, the witness of reason, and the witness of the Scriptures.

I. The witness of human instinct.

The instinct of the individual here and there may be wrong, but the perennial instinct of the race is true. It must be true else we live in a state of perpetual self-deception and God has given us desires to mock us as would some cruel king who would make the starving of a poor subject more terrible by showing him now and then an inviting banquet. Man is made in God's likeness, and instinct is the echo of God in the soul, like to the echo of the measureless sea in the sea-shell. All races and peoples have felt that there should be a conscious reunion after death. Socrates with the cup of poison in his hand said to his friends: "If the common expression be true that death conveys us to the place of departed men, then with delight I drink this hemlock, for it sends my spirit to commune with Homer and Hesiod." The Romans believed it. The Egyptians, the earliest of the race, believed it, for they filled with toys the hands of their dead children and with trinkets for others who had died before that these might be carried to them. The Hindus believed it, and the widow who ascended the funeral pyre to be burned was wont to say, "Oh, that I may enjoy as many years with my departed husband as there are hairs in this flowing braid!" Men have always believed and

still believe that we shall know each other in the better life.

II. The witness of human reason.

There are four links in the chain of reason that weld themselves into an irrefutable demonstration. Let us assume the fact of immortality, this being my starting point. The second link in that chain is identity, individuality. This follows the fact of immortality as a necessary sequence. Conscious personality is not impaired by death. I am. I think. Let him who may strive to prove that I shall never do these things. I am a self-conscious personality and that self-consciousness I shall never lose. Death does not even impair it; it is but a covered bridge, a cut through the mountain. We shall not sink our personality nor lose our identity as the drop of water is lost in the fathomless sea.

Then the third link in that chain is memory. Memory is a natural and necessary postulate of the soul. I cannot exist without memory and memory is immortal. In the other world Abraham said to the rich man, "Son, remember," and the justice of his punishment he based upon a fact which he could remember. We can have no moral existence without memory. We could not even be judged at the Great Day without memory. If a prisoner were at the bar for some crime and could not remember the crime, he would not be sent to prison; he would be sent to the asylum because he would not be regarded by the courts as a moral agent. And if God calls me at the last great day to answer

for deeds done in the body, how shall I answer for them unless I can remember them and these deeds are so thoroughly identified with the lives of others that in remembering them I must remember those identified with them? And if I remember those, then why shall I not always remember them? We shall all doubtless walk together in the green pastures and review with our friends and loved ones the joys and sorrows of this earthly life. We shall remember there as clearly as we remember here the old home, the old oak in the yard, the spring down under the hill, the tree where the chestnuts first fell, the slope where the berries hung red, and the companionships of youth where friendship bloomed into love and when that love became to us a good angel to guide our feet in the ways of purity and peace.

Now, then, the fourth link in the chain is recognition. If we live on and maintain our identity, and if we live on we must maintain our identity, else we might as well not live; and if we maintain the self-conscious ego, then we must also remember, for memory is a necessary faculty of one's being as much as reason or imagination, then the necessary consequence of all this is, that there must be recognition. Walking the streets of Washington one day with a classmate of mine from South Carolina, we decided to stroll out through one of the parks. Ahead of us we saw a young man and I said to my classmate that the man was another member of our class, whom I named. Though his

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back was turned and he was a good distance ahead of us we thought that we recognized the walk and the build as his. We argued the matter for a little while until the man ahead of us reached down to strike a match and light his pipe. A certain peculiarity in striking a match led us both to say instantly that the man was our friend in question. We called to him and he turned and made answer. If a peculiarity of the body can identify one on the earth, why may not some little individual feature of the soul serve to identify one in heaven? Dr. Burrell tells of a county fair in New England where the parade was being led by some old-time musicians, veterans of the War of 1812. A gray-haired drummer had taken his place by the side of a decrepit fifer. They were quite unknown to one another. They led the march with their music. At last the fifer struck up a tune in which the drummer did not follow him. The fire kindled in the old drummer's eyes. He held his sticks motionless, then approaching the fifer he pulled back the cap from his gray hair and with flashing eyes cried out, "John, you have played that before; you played it in the charge at Lundy's Lane. I mind ye, I played the drum beside ye that bloody day. Man, where have ye bin?" Such times as that in heaven must be a natural corollary of the faculties which are exercised in the flesh on earth.

III. The witness of the Holy Scriptures.

That we shall know each other in the better land is the clear testimony of the Scriptures. This

testimony is recorded in those passages which speak of the departed as having joined the saints triumphant. For example, we find this expression frequently appearing in the Old Testament,—“He was gathered to his fathers.” That does not mean that they were buried in the same grave. They were not. It was not the case with Abraham. It could not have been the case with Moses. Yet it is said of them that they were gathered to their fathers. It must have been a conscious reunion with those long-departed dead who had been loved in life. Then we find the same truth in the story of David’s bereavement. When told that his child was dead, he washed himself and went into the house of the Lord and worshiped, saying, “He shall not return to me, but I shall go to him.” He could not have been comforted by the thought that he would go to the grave with him, nor could he have found comfort in the thought that he would enter into an existence in which he would not know his child. It must have been the thought of a future conscious reunion with and recovery of that loved and lost child that brought peace to his soul.

Again we see the proof of it in those passages that give us a picture of heaven. For one thing heaven is spoken of as a home. “In my Father’s house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you.” That must mean that heaven is a home. What makes a home? Not four walls and a roof and a floor; not tapestries and pictures and carpets; not even beds and food

and shelter and drink. That which makes a home is the presence of our loved ones. What sort of a heaven would that be where the members of the family did not even know one another? I repeat that there is a good deal of pious ignorance about feeling that you shall be so absorbed in the praise of God that you shall have no time to think of your dear friends. There is nothing incompatible between the love of God and the love of our friends. In fact God's love is made perfect in us when we love one another.

Still further, we see this fact in those passages that speak of heaven as a feast. Well, it would be a chilly sort of an experience to sit down at a banquet where we knew no one except the host. I have had a few such experiences. I have been at banquets where I knew only a few people and none knew me, and I tell you it is right much of a bore. Shall we look forward to being at the marriage feast of the Lamb and not expect to meet our friends there? Jesus said, "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." Why sit with the patriarchs if we are not to know them? Heaven is not to be an eternal masquerade party. It is to be a feast where loved ones will mingle, where we shall rejoice in the host and also rejoice with the guests, many of whom are our friends here.

There are, furthermore, clear glimpses of heaven given us in the New Testament. Take, for ex-

ample, the story of our Lord's transfiguration. Here were two worthies who had been dead for long centuries, but who knew not only each other but who were known and recognized by the disciples who were still in this world and taking an active part in the affairs of this life. Then consider the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man in perdition saw Lazarus in heaven and knew him and those in heaven knew the rich man. You may say that that is only a parable, but would Christ use a parable that would deceive and teach a false doctrine as to heaven?

Consider also the New Testament teaching concerning our departed dead. This is exactly what Paul was doing in the passage which I have taken as a text. The Thessalonians were disturbed about their loved ones who had departed. They had died, many of them as martyrs. They had given up their lives as a testimony, and the question with the Christians of Thessalonica was whether they would ever see their loved ones again. Would they ever meet? Paul says, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them who are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. . . . For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up

together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Note the use of the word "we." We shall be there as friends and loved ones, who have contended for the faith and have entered into life.

Thus, my friends, the hope of a blessed resurrection and reunion rests upon the sure testimony of Scriptures as well as upon the testimony of reason and instinct. And, as Paul counsels, we are to comfort one another with these words.

"As for thy friends, they are not lost,
The severed vessels of thy fleet,
Though parted now, by tempests tossed,
Shall safely in the haven meet.

"The stars come nightly to the sky,
The tidal wave into the sea,
No height nor depth, not near nor far
Can keep my own away from me."

My friends, I speak to many a bereaved heart, many a bereaved husband or wife who long to look again into each other's eyes. You do not need to sorrow as those who have no hope, for you shall meet and whatever is pure in earthly love shall still exist purified and glorified, and even though the relationship may not be the same, the love will be the same and more intense. I speak to bereaved fathers and mothers who have little children there. The promise is that you shall meet them and know them there and they shall know you. I speak to

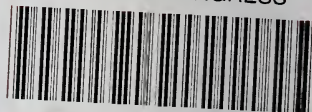
fatherless and motherless children who want nothing so much as they want again mother. You shall have her back, and of all of us who have lost friends and dear ones it shall be said in that day as it was said of the widow of Nain whose son Jesus had raised from the dead, "Jesus delivered him to his mother." Jesus shall likewise give back to all of you the dear departed dead in a reunion never again to be broken. And we shall, all of us, sit down with them at the marriage supper of the Lamb. When that banquet is spread in the Father's house, I expect to be there and I expect to meet my friends there. And if one is not there, it will be his own fault, for Jesus has spread the table and sent you an invitation and loved ones wait for you there.

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